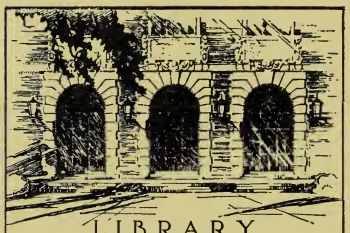
A MAN OF THE MOORS



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A MAN OF THE MOORS

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BY

HALLIWELL SUTCLIFFE

AUTHOR OF
"THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT," "A TRAGEDY IN GREY," ETC.

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO., LTD.

PATERNOSTER HOUSE, CHARING CROSS ROAD

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A MAN OF THE MOORS.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOOR MAN COMES BACK TO HIS OWN.

Joe Strangeways the husband was called; and if roughness could make any man a diamond, then he was emphatically of the purest water. But, apart from his roughness, the untrained eye could detect few good qualities in him; his wife had searched, with tears and prayer, for any redeeming point in his character, and now, at the end of five years, she found herself further than ever from the goal. A harsh man he was, indifferent when not jealous, callous when not actively cruel: his speech was coarse, his voice harsh and raucous, and he was in a perpetual state of growing a beard—a thick, black scrub, as rough as his uncouth tongue. Once a week he got very drunk, and his wife, before she learned to know the signs of the times and to prepare herself accordingly, was apt to suffer physical discomfort.

Kate Strangeways, the wife, was in all things the opposite of her husband: strong, while he was blustering; sensitive, while he was callous; careful of speech and of her personal appearance, while he cared not a pipeful of shag for these things. She was of the fine moor breed, and she had grown up under the eye of the great God who dwells between the hill-summits and the clouds. Why she had married Joe Strangeways, it would have been hard to say; his position as master-quarryman of the works at the edge of the moor was not one

to tempt the recognized belle of a country that knew how to rear fine women; his manners did not atone in any way for deficiencies of appearance; her own folk were opposed to the marriage. Perhaps it was just because he had everything against him that the woman in her drove her into his arms.

If you leave the village of Marshcotes behind you, and strike straight across the moor, at the end of three miles or so you will see a biggish house frowning down on you from the top of the ridge which divides the counties of Yorkshire and Lancashire. It had been a roystering spot once on a time, this Peewit House, when a race of sturdy moor squireens held it; but the old breed had died out, and people were not eager, even in those days, to cross three miles of heath in search of a dwelling. Joe Strangeways had obtained a long lease of the place at a nominal rental; he liked to think his wife had no neighbours, for his cur-bred kind of jealousy resented the thought that she was able to hold converse with her fellows while he was away at the quarries.

The tale of Kate Strangeways' life might have run so to the end, had it not been for a certain charitable old lady who lived in the Manor House at the end of Marshcotes village. Mrs. Lomax had the reputation of being mad; but, so long as her madness took the form of distributing money, wine, and food broadcast through the district, no one resented it. She certainly was eccentric, this gaunt old lady: she made a practice of walking at least ten miles every day of her life, winter and summer alike, and the habit had reduced her to an extraordinary leanness of person; her clothes were always too large for her, and her voice was harsh as a man's, through constant exposure to wind and rain. But she was a lady, and a soft-hearted one to boot, despite her gauntness and her shabbiness; and her one consuming pride lay in the fact that the Lomaxes had held the Manor since Marshcotes was a village, a matter of some five hundred odd years.

Kate Strangeways fell ill one spring, and Mrs. Lomax chanced to drop in during one of her lengthy walks.

"H'm," observed the old lady, as she rose to take her

leave, "you want fattening. Good red port is the thing for you, and I shall bring you some to-morrow."

"Oh, there is nothing the matter with me!" protested the sick woman. "I won't think of your troubling."

"Now, my dear, you are falling a victim to pride, which is a bane. I have had my own way for sixty-three years, and I shall not submit to dictation from a child of twenty-five. You will see me again to-morrow."

Strangeways looked black when he heard of the visit; he had no pride in the matter of accepting good red port—he was, in fact, already drinking it in anticipation—but it was a shock to him to learn that Mrs. Lomax and his wife had seen as much of each other in the past as Kate admitted, in a thoughtless moment, to have been the case.

"Keep thyseln to thyseln, and let other fowk do th' same!" he growled, betaking himself to the kitchen sink for a wash.

Hannah, the maid-of-all-work, was washing a dishcloth when Strangeways entered; she was no friend of Kate's, because they both happened to be women with wills of their own, and she never wearied of insinuating spokes into her mistress's wheel.

"There's a sight o' fuss an' clatter, to my thinking, when some fowks is poorly," she said, settling her square jaw into firmer lines. "Th' missus, just becos she feels a bit out o' sorts, like, gets a notion that she's going to dee: she mun hev this, an' she mun hev that, an' Mrs. Lummax, th' girt gawk, comes an' fal-lals her to th' top on her bent, till there's no doing nowt wi' her nohow. Gie me a man to live wi', says I, what doesn't sicken becos his little finger hes a pimple on't."

"Hod thy din, woman, an' let me wash myseln!" muttered Joe, thrusting her aside, and taking his place at the sink. Hannah's little speech, however, had had its effect, and Strangeways already found himself doubly aggrieved at the intrusion of Mrs. Lomax into his home. "There'll no good come on it," he said, as he buried his brawny arms in the soapsuds: "what does she, a lady born, want to mak free an' easy wi' my wife for? Comes here for a cup o' tea now an' then, does

she, when she gets tired o' trapesing about th' moor? Well, I'll be heving summat to say to that i' a while."

Mrs. Lomax, however, true to her word, brought a basket of good things to Peewit House on the following morning; and the sight of two cobwebby bottles did much to put Strangeways in a better humour, when he came home at the end of the day's work. After the tea-things had been removed, he settled himself in the ingle nook, lit his pipe, and took one of the bottles in his hand.

"Tha needs summat sustaining, lass," he observed, knocking the bottle-neck against the mantel-shelf; "an' happen I'll join thee, for fear tha should feel lonely, like."

"You're not to drink it, Joe; it was only meant just for a glass now and then, and I won't have Mrs. Lomax put on."

"Oh, tha willun't, willun't tha? We'll see about that," retorted Joe, with grim levity.

He reached down a pewter mug from the wall, filled it to the brim, and took a long gulp: then he passed it across to his wife, but she refused to touch it. As the evening wore on, Joe grew mellow with the unaccustomed vintage; he opened the second bottle, and Kate, having exhausted entreaty and abuse alike, left him in disgust. She locked the bedroom door, as her custom was at such times, and left her husband to pass the night as best he could.

A few days later Mrs. Lomax dropped in again.

"Now, my dear, are you feeling any better for the wine?" she asked, in a voice that was more suited to a battle-field than to an invalid's room. "You're not looking one scrap better, at any rate. Come, have you obeyed my orders?"

Kate flushed.

"I—I don't care to drink it," she stammered.

Mrs. Lomax glanced sharply at her; she had some acquaintance with Joe Strangeways' habits, and she read the situation aright.

"You must. Bring out a bottle this moment, and I shall watch you drink two glasses at the least."

Again the younger woman flushed, then grew pale with shame; she could answer nothing, with those two hawk-like eyes looking through and through her. The old lady's lips took to themselves a grim smile.

"About what time does your husband return from his work?" she demanded.

"He leaves the quarries at the half after five—but—you wouldn't be thinking of saying anything, Mrs. Lomax?"

"That is just what I am thinking of, my dear; it is five o'clock now, and I have not walked as much as I should like to-day. I will go towards the quarries and give your husband a straightforward piece of my mind. No, you need offer no excuses for him; when I make up my mind to a thing, I make it up, and there is an end of it." And with this the old lady marched out at the door, her back stiffened, her right hand flourishing the belligerent-looking stick which was her inseparable companion.

Strangeways, crossing the dip in the moor this side the quarries, was aware of a bony figure, three inches his master in point of height, standing across his path.

"Joe Strangeways, I want a word with you."

Joe thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and tried to assume an air of ease; but he did not feel at home with the situation.

"Well, here I stand, my masterful lady; I'm hearkening."

"You have a wife who is a hundred times too good for you; she falls ill through no cause whatever but your treatment of her, and then—you drink the wine which I brought to strengthen her."

"It's a lie!" cried Joe, his face blackening.

"Is it a lie, Joe Strangeways?" said the old lady, that merciless eye of hers driving his own under shelter.

There was a pause; then, "Who telled ye?" he blurted out. "War it Kate?"

"No, it was not Kate. You think me mad, you people hereabouts—oh yes, I know all about it—but, let me tell you, I can see as far as my neighbours into the heart of a stone wall.

I am not a fool, my man, and I guessed well enough what would happen if a drunkard and a bottle came together."

Joe's face grew blacker than ever. He half removed one hairy fist from his pocket.

"An' who are ye, I'd like to know, to come telling a man he's a drunkard?"

Mrs. Lomax straightened herself and grasped her stick by the middle.

"I am a woman who can support her own opinions. Joe Strangeways, I'm in two minds whether to give you a sound thrashing or not."

Strangeways became limp. His mind was not quick of movement, and this reversal of a natural law dazed his perceptions; the gaunt figure seemed to tower above him in a way that was uncanny—even terrifying.

"I will let you go this time, for your wife's sake," went on the old lady, with grim pleasantry. "I will give you another chance; but, mark my words—if you touch the next bottle of port I bring, you will have to account to me for it."

Away she strode through the heather with that, and left the man agape with wonder.

"Begow," he muttered, "she's a limb of the devil, yon, an' proper." By the time he gained Peewit House he had realized fully that he had been beaten by a woman, and a consuming hatred took him by the throat. "I'll be even wi' her yet—by God, I will!" he cried, as he stamped into the kitchen. But he left all succeeding bottles of port severely alone.

Kate Strangeways got a little better when the summer came; but it was utter loss of heart from which she was suffering, and there are few cures for that complaint. Joe had been gentler in his treatment of her since the interview with Mrs. Lomax, for the old lady was in and out of the house a great deal, and a superstitious awe of her was gaining on Strangeways; the more he thought of her appearance on that memorable evening, the more was he disposed to accredit her with Satanic powers—and Joe, for all his bluster, was sorely afraid of the devil.

They were cutting the aftermath in the upland meadows,

and the heather was losing its purple, when Mrs. Lomax's son came home to Marshcotes. Griff Lomax had made his way in the world by this time, as the hill-men are bound to do, once they can persuade themselves to seek the valleys. He had painted a score of pictures that had brought him popularity, and two which had earned him something more: kindly elders, whose opinions had not hardened into the grooves of their own little techniques, said great things of his future, and regarded even present performances with an instinctive laying-by of critical acumen; devoted youngsters, who kicked at the graver and loved the lighter paintings, urged him to bid for the Academy and creep into the easy-chairs reserved for Society pets. And these same easy-chairs had shown an alluring softness for awhile. After the rough-and-tumble fellowship of moor gales, there was a plausible imitation of comfort to Griff in the tinkle of dainty tea-cups, the scent of delicate draperies, the mincing mock-profundity of clever young men and women who pelted their deepest passions with the mud of paradoxical phrasing.

It was ten years now since he had set off for London, with a portfolio of crude moor sketches in his bag, and in his heart a measureless yearning to conquer something. What the something was, he neither knew nor cared to realize; perhaps he would win fame, perhaps love, or the gold that spelt "power" —but, whatever direction his more settled desires might take, he meant to conquer. The glare of the city-bound life, the eager running to and fro in a laden atmosphere, the desperate, thin-lipped eagerness to shut down a trap-door on all that made for dignity, or purpose, or enthusiasm—these things had dazzled him for awhile; he had learned the strange tongue with a quickness native to him, and he told himself from time to time that the wider life had opened before him.

But deep under all this there was a still, small voice that would insist on a hearing now and then; it was a voice more powerful than conscience—the voice of an instinct—and it cursed him for a fool when he babbled of the wider life. For five hundred years the Lomaxes, generation after generation,

had grown to manhood with the taste of the peat in their mouths, and the quickening heath-winds in their veins; his London folly was the folly of those who build their houses on the lava of a sleeping volcano, and think themselves secure. It was this underlying sense of honesty that roused Lomax, from time to time, to endeavours which were worthy of him; that made him expose rough edges, sudden elemental passions, to the startled gaze of the friends who thought they knew him.

There was a little hothouse woman, named Sybil Ogilvie, who had chained him with silk, and who enjoyed what was to her merely a prudent flirtation with the tremulous zest of one who is teaching a half-tamed bear to dance. To Lomax the affair was not a flirtation—and, if it were not love, it hurt him just as much as if it had been. Mrs. Ogilvie had a talent for drawing out all that was paltry in a man, and a genius for making him believe that she had touched his strongest passions.

But the end had come at last. Griff Lomax began to be restless under his yoke, contemptuous of the butterfly canvases that won him flattery. The still, small voice of the moor grew louder; he yearned for the wide-eyed hill-spaces, where the heather was free to stretch away and away till it gained the far sky-line; the streets, the houses, the hurry and empty bustle of chattering crowds, grew nauseous. He had dwelt among the flesh-pots and loved them for a space, and had learned, once for all, the sorry wisdom they had at command. He saw at last—what his friends had seen from the first—that his passion for Sybil Ogilvie was a pitiful chase after moonbeams. Without a word of good-bye to her, he packed up his things and set off for the North, and every swing of the coach set his heart beating faster, because it carried him nearer *home*.

People had wondered at those two moor pictures of his, which had shown him capable of depth. They could not understand that indefinable something about them which set people's veins tingling as if they had been out in a gale from the fresh north-west. The painter knew, though, what that

"something" was; he had come to the heath that had mothered him for more of it. And here he was, home again at the old Manor House, aglow with the deep underlove of his own moor folk and his old moor life.

He rushed into the Manor hall like a whirlwind, and took that gaunt five-foot-ten of motherhood into his arms, and made just as much of her as his heart prompted.

"Yes, Griff, you will do; you will do very well. I am proud of you," said Mrs. Lomax, standing away from him, and revelling in the sight of a son who found it necessary to stoop to the level of her lips.

"And I am proud of you, mother—proud, too, of the moors that reared us both. You can't tell how *lifted* I felt as I came up the rickety main street, with the old Black Bull at the top. Mother, what fools people are! They wonder where I get my inspiration, and they would never believe if I told them."

"It doesn't signify, Griff; you and I know, don't we? Now, how long are you going to give me? I don't mean to let you go under a month."

"I want to winter here, if you will let me; a whole year I have been away, and now I am to have a spell of home."

"Thank you for that word *home*, dear. You are sound at the core, I think, Griff."

"But rotten in the rind, eh, mother? It sounds rather as if you meant that."

Again the old lady surveyed him critically. "No, you are moor-oak from bark to heart—in spite of the feeble women you have been painting lately. I wish your father were alive to see you, Griff."

"You'll turn my head, foolish mother. Give me something to eat, instead of naming me in the same breath with father; it is a long stride to *that*."

He followed her into the kitchen, with its polished dish-covers on the wall, its sand on the floor, its glorious old fireplace, big enough for ten ordinary fires. He teased Rebecca,

the cook, into mock indignation, as he had done time and again in years gone by. He tickled the tail of the tom-cat that lay dozing on the hearth, and laughed like a boy when the grizzled old fellow awoke and spat at him.

"Now, Becky, I want a really square meal—a downright, Yorkshire meal," he cried. "You have a remarkably fine ham there; down with it, and cut me some slices. As many eggs as you like. Oat-cake, too—yes, I must have oat-cake and cheese to finish with. Phew, mother, it's good to be back!"

When the meal was over, and Griff had smoked a couple of pipes in the ingle-nook; when the mother and he had fired off questions and answers at each other, and had taken joy of their being together once more, Griff rose and bent over the old lady.

"May I go out and have a chat with the moors? I won't be long away," he laughed.

"Of course, Griff. I have no say in the matter, really, have I?" responded the mother, with a lover-like affectation of pique.

"In that case I won't go."

"Nonsense, boy! Off with you, and don't stay longer than you can help. Will I come with you? Certainly not! You want to have your chat in private; two's company, and I shall have my revenge when you return. Away with you!"

Yes, Griff did want his talk with the moor to be a private one. As he crossed the churchyard, and followed the path through a couple of pasture fields, and up the narrow lane that led to the first of the heather, he was full of anxious eagerness. Would the old holy places be holy still? Would that changeless, everlasting sweep of brown and grey speak to his heart as it once had done? He had been blind; he had roved among lighter allegiances—how if the moor were sick of his inconstancy, and would stretch out no hand of fellowship?

But all that passed. The heath admits few to its friendship, but it never falters in its choice.

As Griff swung over the rise, past the rubble heaps thrown out by the quarries; as he saw the well-remembered undulations of heather and marsh-land and peat, he knew that he was taken home again. The old swift thrill ran through him: strength restrained, pathos that scorned to voice itself, roughness that hid a mighty, yearning tenderness—he understood it all, felt it all, as he had done in the days of his freedom.

No words can touch this feeling a moor man has for his country; it is a religion he never seeks to express—a vitality that helps him to do his work in the world.

Up against the furthest sky-line, showing gallows-black athwart the sunset, stood the threefold timbers of a rotting crane, dismantled long ago when the quarry ceased working. Perhaps no other details of the landscape seem more to express the whole than these gaunt creatures of wood: wherever a Marshcotes man sets eye on a quarry-crane climbing into the sky, he thinks of the Marshcotes moor and the soughing of wind through the heather.

A fat old grouse got up as Lomax approached, and winged its way towards the sunset. Griff, wondering if he had forgotten his ancient cunning, dropped into a clump of crowberry bushes and imitated the call of the hen. Soon a second cock grouse came whirring across the moor—but towards him this time, not away from him—and responded in a hoarse bass. Griff tried his voice at all the signals—warning and invitation, desperate love and the preliminaries of a mere flirtation; and the cock bird was taken in by them all.

Griff laughed, in a round, wholesome way, as he rose to his feet again. It was only the London life that had passed away. He stood for a long while gazing into the wonderful sunset flames: from south to north the sweep of colour stretched itself, and a little north of west the half of a ruddy sun was taking its farewell of the heath. He watched till the red sun-rim had altogether gone, till the orange had faded to yellow, and the yellow to grey; till the dips in the moor plateau were filled with a mystical gloom which seemed to well upward from

the peat, rather than downward from the sky; till the rotting crane, that stood on the verge of the under-world, grew ghost-like and dim as the twilight deepened to the hue of its own black timbers.

And still the old love was the new. Still the moor reached out a lover's arms to Griff, and held him close to her breast. He was a moor man again.

CHAPTER II.

THE PERVERSION OF GABRIEL HIRST.

A MILE and a half due west of Marshcotes, on the highroad that takes you straight to the Lancashire border, lies another village—little more than an overgrown hamlet it is—which is just as compact as its neighbour is straggling. Marshcotes runs down one hill and up another, branching off into queer little streets on the way: but Ling Crag stands square to the moor-top winds, and gets a sight of the sun long after the shelter-seeking Marshcotes houses are greying with twilight.

To this day they are a people to themselves, the villagers of Ling Crag, and, though you come but a league's distance from their boundaries, they account you a foreigner. Slow to speak well of a neighbour, and quick to help him in need; keen as can be when a bargain is toward; more respectful to their conceptions of tangible, everyday duty than to class distinctions; assured, beyond reach of doubt or argument, that their village is the hub of the universe—of such sort are the people of Ling Crag.

A generation or two ago, however, they were a rougher folk than now, leading rougher lives. A soul-searching, hell-fearing Methodism was the dominant note of their existence; and Methodism has ever since been a vital force with them, though it has changed with the change it has wrought in the people. With their rugged strength, their fearlessness of purpose, it was only natural that religion, when first it came into the midst of their wild, strenuous lives, should fit itself in a measure to the soil. They were harsh by example of the winds and the storms that had reared them, generation after generation,

and the religion that sought to teach them must also be harsh in its precepts. So their preachers went in and out, and spoke the language of the folk they had to deal with, and led them, little by little, into the quieter places of charity and long-suffering. But Ling Crag was young to religion then, and fear was the larger part of their faith. They were much addicted to superstition, too, these upland folk; and when they sinned, they sinned with groanings of the spirit and retrospective shakings of the head at the old Adam who was responsible for it all.

There is one biggish house in Ling Crag, planted down shoulder to shoulder with its cottage neighbours. It stands on the right hand of the road as you come from Marshcotes; the strip of front garden, with its boundary wall, round-topped and sombre, gives it an air that narrowly escapes haughtiness by contrast with the other dwellings in the hamlet. The Hirsts had lived here almost as long as the Lomaxes had held Marshcotes Manor. They were roysterers once, and the family fortunes were like to evaporate in cards and drink and horseflesh, when old Tom Hirst, luckily for his only son, "took religion"—took it whole-heartedly: he pondered hourly upon his latter end, and fell to crying loud "Amens" in Ebenezer Chapel whenever a gathering was toward, and laboured hard to bring up Gabriel, the child of his old age, in the way of godliness. Gabriel was born just when the reformation heat was strongest, and old Hirst, in the choice of his son's name, thought to hall-mark him for life with the brand of piety. At ten the boy had already learned to believe himself singled out by the Almighty, with peculiar care, for the receipt of punishment; had learnt to pray against the lusts of the flesh; had learnt to feel himself the loathliest and most persistent sinner of all God's creatures. As he grew up, he trained himself more and more to pit his gaining strength against the devil, and wrestled mightily by night and day.

Old Tom died, and his wife followed him a twelvemonth after; and Gabriel, each time that he stood by the grave-side in the wind-swept burial-ground, longed to bury his own flesh also

out of sight; the worms of earth, it seemed to him, were gentler than that other Worm that dieth not, and longer life meant but a longer space in which to sin. But Heaven shut its ears to his prayers, and would not give him that coveted six-by-three of rest. He walked in perpetual fear—a fear that sometimes wrung the sweat from his body—and could lay his hands to nothing; he could only stride restlessly across the sheep-tracks of the moor, or ride like a madman along the naked upland highways. He avoided chapel and the society of his fellows, feeling himself a leper among clean men; he was like to go mad from isolation and self-commune.

It was then that the Wesleyan minister at Marshcotes got hold of him, and drew him a comforting picture of the joys of being saved. He went to a Revival; he heard men and women all about him crying on God that they were saved—others groaning in the throes of their final wrestling-bout with the Adversary—others again laughing with hysterical delight. His soul kindled to the spiritual fire. He felt himself lifted on mighty pinions; the sound of swinging chants of praise was in his ears, the swirl of countless rushing angels fanned his cheeks. He closed his eyes, and a great sob broke from him. He was saved.

From that day onward he began to preach; his long experience of such sort of fight lent him substance for his sermons, and his inborn strenuousness of character made an orator of him. He did not join the regular ministry, but became established as a local preacher. His fame, little by little, grew big among the congregations of such chapels as lay on the line of his quarterly circuit, till in time "Gabriel Hirst" grew to be a name to conjure with. All Marshcotes and Cranshaw, every scattered hamlet for miles around, knew Gabriel "by sight and by speech," and the Ling Crag folk were mightily proud of their preacher. Things have altered with Methodism since then, but in those days it was a matter of course that Gabriel should have a special band of admirers who would go as far even as Ludworth to hear him preach on a Sunday morning. So devoted, indeed, was the preacher's

"following," that it was much as if he had a regular congregation of his own; whether he held forth in Ling Crag or Marshcotes, Ludworth or Cranshaw, always the same knot of familiars grouped themselves round the chapel doors after service, and estimated to a nicety the amount of Gabriel's recent inspiration. Indeed, when the fire of certain newly-roused passions began to drive him into the wilderness, the change might be gauged with tolerable accuracy by listening to such comments on his sermons.

If a young man were reluctant to amend his ways, or a maiden showed herself over-flighty, Gabriel Hirst's sermons were the infallible remedy. He could invoke the thunders of God, and paint hell-fire, with greater vigour than any of his fellows, and even the most careless of sinners quailed before his description of the judgment in store for them. Perhaps the maidens of Ling Crag were less satisfied with the preacher than his piety warranted. He was well off, "straight set up," and had good looks of a rugged kind. Had he asked one of them to marry him, she would probably have given favourable consideration to the proposal. But Gabriel scarcely seemed to understand that they were women. They might don their best hats and infuse rough coquetry into their glances, but he was not aware of it; they were just fellow-sufferers with himself in a world whose keynote was original sin, and they gained interest in his eyes only through the effort that was necessary to keep them in the right path.

Yet, underneath it all, Gabriel Hirst had the faults and the virtues of his own folk developed to their furthest extremes. The old moor blood, pagan to its last drop, was quick in his veins. Reared to the conviction that he had a "call," he strove night and day to keep the spirit working within him, strove to deaden the voice of the moor wind at his ear and the cry of remoter fathers in his heart. He was a strong man, and a passionate man, and for the five years since his first sermon he had, with an energy almost savage, forced his strength into the service of his religion.

For the rest, Gabriel was a gentleman farmer, who delegated

most of his work in this direction to one Jose Binns, a godly, lean-flanked man, who was wont to class Betty his wife, the master, and the uncertainty of hay-crops, all as dire responsibilities sent to him by the Lord as a punishment for his overwhelming sinfulness. Yet Jose managed the farm excellently, and was a rare hand at "selling or swopping a beäst."

Griff Lomax and the preacher had run about the countryside together as boys, and many a time of late, when Lomax came home to the Manor for his brief spells of holiday, Gabriel had striven to save him as a brand from the burning. London, the devil, and an artistic life were synonymous to Gabriel Hirst, and it was torture to him to think that the friend of his boyhood was going the way of perdition. He loved Griff, now that they had left boyhood well behind, with a certain wild adoration which no effort could stifle; and, just as he prayed his hardest and painted hell in its most vivid colours when the yearning for freedom was strongest upon him, so he would avoid Lomax for a week at a time, would refuse to walk across to Marshcotes in search of him until he was persuaded that he had a genuine call to attempt conversion once again.

On the Friday after Griff's return for the winter, the preacher caught sight of him at a bend of the road that ran from Marshcotes to Ling Crag. He hastily slipped under shelter of a barn and let him pass. He dared not go out to meet him, because the desire was too strong upon him; but when he reached home, and learned from Betty Binns, his housekeeper, that Griff had been in search of him, he sorrowed over the meeting which he had lost of his own free will. Then he dined off tea and dry bread, lest the Adversary should turn stronger food to his own ends, and set off in the rain, and walked the moors for six hours. When he returned, his Sunday morning's sermon was prepared.

With Sunday the short Michaelmas summer began; the clouds had been squeezed dry of rain, and the morning was clear and fresh. Gabriel was down on the circuit plan to preach both morning and evening at the Ling Crag Chapel.

He preached for fifty minutes in the morning—preached

himself into a frenzy—thundered and bellowed and cried from the little pulpit of unpolished deal, until his hearers felt the leaven of damnation working to their finger-tips.

"Eh, but it war grand, grand!" passed from mouth to mouth, as the congregation gathered round the door after service.

The softer sort of Methodists were to be found here and there; but these rarely lifted their voices after service, being quiet men and women who did not care to entangle themselves in argument.

This morning, however, the harsher spirits were not having things all their own way. Old Jose Binns had just had his say about the sermon.

"There's a deal o comfort i' listening to the likes o' yon," he had said, in his tone of grudging praise. "Ye could see by th' face on him 'at t' Sperrit war moving him, an' proper. There's not a mony like Gabriel hereabouts."

"He can preach, can th' lad, an' there's no denying it," spoke up a tall, spare man on the outskirts of the group. "But's he's ower young, to my thinking, to ponder so mich on th' dark side o' this world an' th' next, an' niver gie us a taste o' th' gooid there is about. He mud be softer by th' half, an' niver be th' war for 't."

Old Binns screwed up his mouth a shade tighter.

"We're hard folk up here, Ebenezer, an' softness is nowt i' our way."

"Hard folk we be, an' all th' more call there is for a bit o' softness now an' again. If religion warn't gi'en us to soften our hearts, what mak o' use is 't, Jose Binns?"

"Ay, ay, tha'rt right there," chimed in another voice. "Ye mark my words, lads. I'm fourscore year an' ower, an' I've seen what I've seen, an' I tell ye, there'll a day come when all this shutting up o' th' gooid side o' human natur—fair as if 'twere summat to be shamed on—'ull pass away for gooid an' all. Ye willun't listen to th' preachers 'at wants to leäd instead o' frightening ye, though we've a mony as 'ud be glad for ye to hear 'em. Ye mun ha' nowt but

judgment an' wrath, an' ye willun't bide owt softer. What do Gabriel Hirst know o' th' better side o' things? He's nobbut a kittling yet, as hes niver known th' love of a woman."

"Shame on thee, shame on thee!" growled Jose Binns. "An old man like thee to be talking o' love an' sich-like lightness, when a man o' God has just been telling thee to shun th' sinful flesh an' all its warks. Dost call thyseln a Methodist?"

"Ay, lad; I call myseln a Methodist, an' there's nowt i' th' doctrine what forbids a man to see th' gooid i' hisseln as well as th' bad. Thee bide till th' little pracher hes getten his hand round th' heft of a straight love for a woman—they're th' best that God has gi'en us, is women, when all's said—an' tha'll find his praching summat godlier, like, nor it hes been."

"Women!" said Jose Binns, turning down the corners of his wry old mouth.

"Women's better nor th' men, ony way," put in Mrs. Binns, sharply. "An' what call hast tha, Jose, to go making fooil's faces at thy own wedded wife? I've a mind to dress thy jacket for thee, that I hev."

Old Binns retreated into the background a little; he no longer felt a prophet in his own country. And a laugh went up from the group, and they fell to talking of this and that, in a hushed, Sabbath fashion.

But the preacher saw no one, heard no one. He staggered out of the graveyard and into the road. He turned through an open gate on his left, and crossed some scanty, sheep-shaven pasture land; the half-starved sheep looked blankly at him, and a bare-ribbed cow stared at him in surprise over a neighbouring wall. Gabriel Hirst awoke to reality; he saw the sunlight on the ridges, and the warm shadows in the hollows; he felt the fresh wind on his face; he heard the call of a linnet from a village garden behind him: and one and all were agony to the would-be man of God. He felt himself full of the lusts of the flesh—a vague, idealistic flesh whose boundaries were infinite, whose sinfulness knew no limits; he could not understand the sunshine, save as a light to search

out his own evil-doing; and he magnified his worthlessness, because he could remember no tangible sin by which to reduce his wild imaginings to a sober standard.

He went through a gap in the wall which confronted him, and stood looking dreamily down on a little wooded dell, through which a moor stream bubbled its way to the river. On a sudden his body grew rigid, his eyes lost their glow of introspection and fixed themselves on a rounded basin of the stream. A girl was paddling in the water, and was singing a love-ballad, in a rich, south-country voice that contrasted oddly with her northern surroundings.

The preacher pressed one hand close upon his heart, and let his eyes note the slender lines of the girl's figure, fast ripening towards womanhood. She seemed fresh and sweet as the wind and sun and water that played with her. Gabriel Hirst looked at the lassie's face, and his pulses leaped to a new delight. He lost his rigid set of body, and stretched out both arms wide to the moors; this was his apology for past misrepresentations.

Down the steep hillside he went, stumbling into rabbit-holes, pricking his ankles with thistle-needles, falling and picking himself up again. The girl became aware of an intruder: she glanced up the hill, and left the water, and seated herself on a pine-log that lay beside the stream. By the time that Gabriel Hirst had reached the brook and jumped it, her little white feet were safely under cover. He stopped; the inspiration that had led him here was at an end, and he had no knowledge of the things that young men say to maidens.

"Why didn't you turn back when you saw me?" demanded the girl. A red flush, of shame and anger mixed, had risen to her cheeks.

Not a word spoke Gabriel Hirst. His late fervour at the chapel, his lifetime of repression and battling against the vital part of himself, seemed to have been swept clear away; he could do nothing but wonder at this new-found form of Grace.

She laughed, a little, musical, defiant laugh.

"I thought I was safe for a good half-hour yet, Mr. Hirst. You keep them so long at chapel when you preach, and I

counted on that. Besides, I was only watching the path up the Dene; no one ever comes the way you came just now."

He winced, and the girl laughed again.

"I—I preached for close on an hour," he said slowly.

"Gracious! I'm glad I was not there. But is it really so late? Time seems to pass so quickly, when one is being a sinner."

"*A sinner!*" gasped the preacher. It had been so clear, a moment ago, that sin was at an end; and now the old battle-cries were beginning to ring in his ears; they clashed with that rounded, human laugh.

"Did you preach well?" she asked, after a pause. There was irony in her tones.

The preacher passed a hand across his eyes, and shuddered.

"I—thought so—at the time," he murmured.

"Ah, well, I have missed something, then. Some day—when the sunshine is gone—I am coming to hear you. You are in love with Hell, aren't you?"

In that moment Gabriel feared, not for his retreating faith, but for the girl's safety. The years were slow to loosen their hold on him, and he could not see how impiety—childish though it was—could escape the summary vengeance of Heaven. But nothing happened to the girl-woman who was seated on the pine-log, her feet gathered under her skirts; and the preacher breathed more freely. Old habit rushed in, and the words slipped out of his mouth.

"Greta Rotherson," said he, "are you prepared to die? Have you ever thought of eternal flames——"

"Ready to die? Not a bit. I'm much too fond of life."

Gabriel Hirst could find no answer. But he looked at her face, and he knew she could *mean* no wrong.

"Can I come to see you?" he said abruptly.

"Come to see us? Yes. We are dull in this stupid village of yours, where every one looks on us with suspicion, just because we come from the south. But—Mr. Hirst—you won't

mind my saying something?" Her tone was graver now, almost supplicating. "Father doesn't want to be converted, and he won't see you if you insist upon it. Do you understand? Come just as a friend, and talk like—like a man."

Without knowing it, she had protruded one white and coral foot beyond the protecting skirt. Gabriel Hirst saw it, and stood irresolute. Then he cried—a bitter, stifled cry, as of a dumb creature in pain—and raced for his life down the bank. At the end of the wood he ran into the arms of Griff Lomax.

"Hallo, what brings you here? Why, man, you look as if you had seen a ghost!" cried Griff.

The preacher was not so strong as he once had been. Tea and bread, his exclusive diet for days at a time, were beginning to tell on him. The excitement of the sermon, the more violent frenzy that had followed it, the clean pair of heels which he had finally shown to temptation, all had their effect. He was breathless, and the sweat was trickling down his face. His body was shaking as with ague. He leaned heavily against a gate; Griff saw that his eyes looked hunted.

"I've lost my ghosts, Lomax," he said brokenly. "They were what I lived by; my father handed them down to me, and I never thought to let them go. I can't see them any more, Griff—the Spirit coming down with a sweep of wings, and the Avenging Angel with a bloody sword in his hands, and the red hell flames licking at the unclean lips of the evil doers. They're lost—all lost."

He left the gate and began to pace up and down the path. Lomax put a strong arm through his.

"You're talking nonsense, old fellow!" he said quietly.

The preacher grew calmer for a while; the muscular grip on his arm, and the big voice telling him not to be a fool, gave him a childish feeling of security. He let his friend take him up through the wood and out among the moors on the other side; he opened his mouth wide and drank in great gulps of the wind. Then, on a sudden, he remembered the full measure of his sinning, and he shut his mouth with a click, and he groaned in bitterness of spirit.

"Griff," he said gravely, "you don't know what I've done. I came out of the chapel wrestling with the Devil: man, I could hear God rebuking me for my sins one minute and cheering me on to the fight the next. And then—I fell away. I saw a woman's face, and I lost every other thought, and I tumbled down the hillside like a madman."

Lomax gave a low mutter of surprise; he glanced sharply at the other's face, and saw that remorse was cutting deep furrows across the brow and beneath the eyes.

"But that is not the worst," went on the preacher, with desperate calm. "I listened to the woman's voice, talking of Hell as if—as if it was a joke, almost; *and I felt no anger.* I was only afraid that Heaven would strike her dead, and take her out of my reach. Man, it's fearful, fearful! I tried to rebuke her—when fear for her life had passed—but the words might as well have come out of a tin kettle, for all the heart that went with them. I can't believe any longer, Lomax."

The preacher's agony was so real, and it was all about so trifling a matter from his friend's standpoint, that Griff could have laughed aloud. That a man should have come to Hirst's age, and be frightened by one overmastering impulse of love—surely there was something absurdly askew in it. But he did not laugh: he just tightened his grip of the other's arm, and—

"Gabriel Hirst," said he, "you've been preaching too much and eating too little. You're going to listen to me now, whether you like it or not. I take my painting about as seriously as you take your religion; I eat it, and live it, and breathe it every moment of my life."

The preacher made a faint murmur of protest, but Griff's hand crushed it out of him, still-born.

"Sometimes, old fellow, I paint too much, just as you have been preaching too much; and I *lose my faith in art.* I go about like a lunatic, and I think perdition has found me at last."

"Perdition has never had far to seek for you, and more's

the pity." Gabriel Hirst was beginning to tingle with fight again—which was just what the other wanted.

"Not *my* perdition; that only comes near when I've been playing the fool with myself. I try not to be a muff at these times, Hirst; I go out, and walk or ride, till I can do nothing but stumble into bed and sleep the clock round. I generally get up *healthy*."

"You mean—you mean that I'm being a muff?" asked the preacher, in surprise. There was no resentment in his tones.

"Yes; that's just about it. Have you to preach to-night?"

"I have; though God knows I'm not fit to do it."

"Then straight home you come with me. Mother will look to it that you don't feed off skim-milk and a crust of bread. You'll preach to-night, Hirst—better than ever you did in your life."

Again the preacher tried to fight, but he was exhausted; he could only follow the lead of this overmastering pagan. Mrs. Lomax was sitting down to dinner when they came in.

"I had given you up, Griff," she said. "You are never to be depended on when once you get to the moors, and I was too hungry to wait. Gabriel, I am glad to see you; what have you been doing to your face? It looks like an old man's."

"He's been fasting, mother, and overworking himself. I put him in your hands; I don't think you will let him starve, much as he wants to."

"No, I don't think I shall," responded the old lady, grimly.

Gabriel Hirst's father and Griff's father had been close friends; dissimilarity of outlook upon every aspect of life had brought them together, just as it had brought the sons together. On both counts—the son's and the father's—Mrs. Lomax was warmly disposed towards Gabriel.

So he sat down, and ate meekly, as he was bidden, of strong meat and apple-pie and cheese. He drank two glasses of good red port; fain would he have asserted himself on this matter, but Mrs. Lomax reminded him of Timothy, and he was altogether too bewildered to do battle on a point of Scripture.

Greta Rotherson, when the preacher disappeared at the corner of the wood, had laughed a little, and frowned a good deal, and had finally put on her stockings and boots. "I wish he had never come," she cried. "It is such a quiet nook, and no one has disturbed me before. I like Gabriel Hirst, though, for all his hardness and his dangling of hell before poor old father's eyes. *Hardness?*" She laughed again at that, softly and musically; for she remembered how the preacher had looked at her a few minutes ago. "He only wants taking in hand by—by a woman who isn't afraid; he's not a fool at the bottom of him."

Then she tossed her hair back from her forehead and went briskly up the wooded cleft of the hills, until she reached a weather-stained corn-mill. The great wooden wheel was creaking intermittently on its axle, as if the jar and fret of work-a-day motion were more to its liking than this enforced Sabbath rest. Old Rotherson, the miller, with his iron-grey hair and shrewd, clean-shaven face, was smoking a churchwarden pipe at his door; the bees had deserted the heather once more in favour of his bit of a garden, and a peacock-butterfly was sunning itself on the house wall. It was hard to believe that the Storm-God had his temple so near to this sheltered cranny of the moors.

"Well, Greta, lass, have you paddled to your heart's content?" cried the old man, as his daughter came in sight.

"Yes, father—and a little more. Gabriel Hirst came down the hillside before I had finished, and he would stop to talk. I had to sit on a log with my legs tucked up under me, and I nearly got cramp before I rid myself of him."

The miller chuckled quietly to his churchwarden.

"He'd never have noticed, child, so you might have spared yourself the trouble. Was he as sour as ever?"

Greta turned her head to watch the peacock butterfly on the wall. Her dimpled cheeks grew rosy.

"Not quite, father. He wanted to know if he could come to see us."

"Lass, lass, I wish folks would let a man's soul alone. What did you say?" groaned the miller.

"That we were proof against conversion, and sick of it. That he might come as a friend if he cared to, and we'd give him a hearty welcome."

"Good, good!" muttered the old man, approvingly. "But I doubt him, Greta; he'll never be able to keep his tongue off that subject for long."

"Well, we shall see. There's Nancy, father, coming to tell us that dinner is ready. I'm ready, too; put down your pipe, dear."

When Gabriel Hirst mounted the pulpit of Ebenezer chapel that evening, he felt none of the old red-hot lava of damnation rising to his lips; he was strangely calm, and at peace with this world and the next; the thought of little children was running, like a silver thread, through every working of his mind. Decent food and a couple of glasses of honest wine had much to do with it; re-action after his two wild extremes of the morning counted for a good deal; but more powerful than either had been those two hours he spent at Marshcotes Manor, under the influence of Griff's cheery optimism and Mrs. Lomax's sane, practical grip of things. He was just about to give out his text when there was a clatter of hob-nailed boots on the stone floor, and he saw old Binns, who was caretaker of the little chapel, showing Greta Rotherson into a seat near the pulpit. For one moment his heart leaped into his mouth, and he thought that it would be impossible to get the words out; but he looked at Greta steadily, and his passion of the morning was gone, and he wondered that the girl's presence should seem to round off some hitherto incomplete ideas. As Griff had prophesied, he preached better than he had ever done in his life: there was no wild denunciation, no fever-heat of appeal, as in other sermons; it was all clear, and crisp, and kindly; above all, it was convincing.

Greta Rotherson paused now and then, on her way out of chapel, to hear the scattered comments of the villagers. Some were glad of the glimpse which had been given them of a

better life than their daily round of hardness and care afforded. Others did not like their preacher under his new aspect; they had too long been supplied with strong stuff to descend willingly to fare on which only women and children could be expected to thrive.

"Well, I'm saying that Gabriel Hirst is noan th' man he war this morning," said one. "He's like as he's lost all fire; not a word o' warm hell-fire did he gie us, an' that's noan like Gabriel."

"Thee hod thy whisht for a while," broke in another. "He war powerful moved this morning, an' it doan't stan' to reason 'at th' Sperrit will wark i' a man fro' morn to neet. Let him bide; he'll ingather some thunder o' th' Lord afore another week comes round."

"Ay, but summat hes come to Gabriel sin' th' morning," said an old woman, with a dry laugh. "I see'd him forebye th' owd corn-mill after his preaching so fine and large about th' lusts o' t' flesh. Miller Rotherson's daughter—ye marked her i' chapel mebbe, to-neet?—war alongside of him, and he war just gaäping an' gaäping at her doll's face of a woman. Gabriel is noan th' man he war, to my thinking."

"Well, now, I did think this morning, while he war fair agate wi' his praching, an' th' words came out as thick as chaff at threshing-time, I did think he warn't exactly what he hed been. Ay, ay, it's a sad to-do when a man o' God goes speering after a pretty wench. An' her noan Ling Crag born, nawther. Nay, I misdoubt th' lad, i' th' latter end. May the Almighty keep me from women, and pardon all my sins, amen."

"Th' women 'll see to that for theirseln, Ephraim; doan't thee put thyseln about," chimed in an irreverent youngster from the rear.

Greta Rotherson had passed out of earshot before the old woman launched her tit-bit of gossip, and she went home with a smile on her face. She was wondering at the change in the preacher—and thinking of that look on his face when first she came out of the water and sat on the pine-log with her little white feet tucked up under her dress.

CHAPTER III.

A MOOR WOMAN.

GRIFF LOMAX bethought him, early on Monday morning, that his friend the preacher would be better for a little more of the same treatment to which he had subjected him yesterday. He found Gabriel just coming down the stairs.

"Well, old fellow, how are things with you to-day? You're late down, at any rate, and that means you have slept."

"Ay, like a child," said the preacher, with a half-rueful, half-ashamed air. "Like a child, Griff—and that after I'd sinned grievously against the Lord."

"Confound it, man," laughed Griff, "I wish I could drive it into you that you're a poorer hand at sinning than most of us. Just you tell yourself, Hirst, that the Lord has a pretty handful to look after, and that He can't spare you the exclusive attention you seem to count on: I should be ashamed to expect it, myself."

"Griff, lad, don't make mock; try to soften your heart to the Lord, and His ways will come clear to you."

The preacher's voice was tender. His yesterday's excitement had left him weak, and his heart turned to Lomax with a mixed feeling that the lad was at once a tower of strength and a weak unbeliever.

"I don't mock in my heart, and you know it, Hirst. But I want to kick some of the nonsense out of you, and that's the truth of it. Now, I'm going to watch you eat your breakfast: what is there on the table? Humph! three slices of bread and butter, and tea—the tea is unconscionably weak, too, by the look of it."

"Here—I say, Griff—what are you going to do?" cried

Gabriel, as his visitor strode out of the room, and across the stone flags of the hall.

Lomax, however, was in the kitchen by this time. The housekeeper was ironing one of Gabriel's coarse cotton shirts.

"Betty Binns," said the intruder, "do you call yourself a woman of sense?"

Mrs. Binns fairly gasped at that. It was bad enough that young Lomax should march into her kitchen without permission, but that he should forthwith give battle to her in this foolhardy way—"well, it did beät all."

"If so be as I'm not, I'm ower old to learn!" she retorted, waiting till her opponent should give her some sure ground for combat.

Griff, spoiling for one of his old-time fights with the redoubtable Betty, put on just that air of smiling effrontery which most annoyed her.

"A woman is as old as she looks, Mrs. Binns, and there's heaps of time yet for you to learn."

"Tak your fal-lal Lunnon manners to them as wants 'em!" snorted Mrs. Binns, viciously laying to on the wristbands of the shirt, and glaring bellicosely at the intruder. She broke a button during the process—a piece of carelessness which did not tend to soothe her ruffled feelings.

"All right; I'm off in a moment. What I wanted to say to you was just this—a woman of sense would never let her master starve as you do. Gabriel Hirst will die before long, if he goes on with these precious slops you give him, and his death will be at your door."

This was an aspect of the situation which had not occurred to Betty. She was not going to confess as much, though, so she merely growled an invitation to Lomax to go on with what he had to say.

"Just put a pan of water on the fire, and a couple of good fresh eggs in the pan—no, you can put four. I've breakfasted already, but I'll start again by way of example."

"An' who gave ye leave, if I may mak so bold as to axe to come lording it i' *my* kitchen?"

"No one; but I'm here all the same. You don't know the food a strong man needs, and I've come to teach you."

Betty Binns was in two minds whether she should throw her iron at Griff's head; but she restrained herself, and tried her hand at grim satire instead.

"Th' maister is a man o' God, Mr. Lummax, which *tha'll* niver be nohow tha tries. It's nobbut likely he should want his vittals different fro' other fowks's."

"The more he's a man of God, the more strength he needs to fight the devil.—Now come, Mrs. Binns, we've had many a set-to in times gone by, and I'll acknowledge you generally have the best of it: won't you do my way this once?"

He was talking sense now, Betty could not but admit. Of course she always had the best of it—it took something more than a mere man to vanquish Betty Binns—and she always had said "there war summat she liked i' th' lad;" and perhaps he was not as far wrong on this occasion as bothersome menfolk generally were.

"Well, happen ye've hit on a bit o' common sense once i' a while. Th' maister, he do look main poorly when th' Sperrit keeps strong meät out on him. Ay, well, well, we'll be seeing."

Lomax chuckled at the overthrow of Betty Binns; he had expected more fight from her. Truth to tell, however, the housekeeper had been sorely bothered of late to see Gabriel growing leaner and leaner; he was a solid, square-built man, as his father had been before him, when Nature had her own way, but his increasing mania for slops was playing havoc with him. So that Betty was really a good deal relieved to find an ally in young Lomax.

"Didn't I say you were a woman of sound sense?" said Griff, with barefaced disregard of his first statement. "You're jolly fond of me, too, Betty, under all that bluster of yours."

Betty raised a rolling-pin from the table, and pursued her tormentor as far as the kitchen door.

"And, Betty, as you love me," he said, by way of a last

Parthian shot, "make a couple of rounds of buttered toast. You will, won't you?"

'I'll lay this about your lugs," retorted Betty, brandishing her weapon, "if ye're not off in a brace o' shakes."

Gabriel Hirst was standing by the window when Griff returned.

"Well, what have you been doing?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing. I felt a bit hungry after the walk from Marshcotes, and I asked Mrs. Binns to boil four eggs."

"I thought you'd had breakfast, or I should have offered it long ago."

"I have had one, but I intend to tackle another. Two eggs for me, two for you; a round of toast each. Your Betty Binns isn't half the sport she was, Gabriel; she gives in like a lamb."

"He's a gooid for naught, is Griff Lummax," muttered Betty, as she cut the bread and held it before the fire; "but there's summat I like about him; ay, I willun't deny 'at he hes a way wi' him."

Gabriel made a last stand when the eggs were set down before him with a clatter.

"You don't know, Griff, how religion takes a man; he wants to be always subduing, subduing, and it's a fearful sin to pamper the carnal body."

"Fiddlesticks! You look after your body, and the Lord will look after your soul; play the fool with your body a year or two longer, and you'll begin to wonder whether you have a soul at all."

"But, Griff—John the Baptist lived on locusts and wild honey, and——"

"You're not John, though, and you happen to have some one to look after you. Chip that egg."

Gabriel obeyed meekly, though he sorely doubted Griff's way of putting things. He ate with a relish, however, and at the end of it Lomax got to the real subject in hand.

"What about this girl? Who is she?" he asked abruptly.

The preacher flushed.

"All last night I was dreaming of her, and that was why I slept so quietly: I forgot that it was the flesh, and we went over the moor together till we got to the Thorntop road. She was more like a spirit than a woman, and her eyes were as quiet and deep and far away as the stars. I whispered, 'Greta,' and she took my head to her breast, and 'Hush!' she said; 'the fight is over and done with, and the reward is here.' Griff, man, it's hard, hard, coming back to the sin."

Griff watched him curiously. The innocence of this broad-shouldered man, his childish outspokenness—he could not tell whether more to pity or admire them.

"Greta? It doesn't sound like one of the names hereabouts. Who is she, Gabriel?"

"Greta Rotherson. She lives at the corn-mill in Hazel Dene."

"What? Is some one running the old mill again? It was standing when I left here last year."

"Yes; Miller Rotherson came from the low country in the spring, saw the mill, and bought it out of hand. You should hit it off, you and he; many's the time I've sought to save his soul alive, but he always has the one answer. 'Give it up, Mr. Hirst,' says he. 'Some men were made to take religion, as your saying is, and some were not; and there's about the end of it. I don't need it, and I couldn't take it if I tried from now till Doomsday.'"

Griff smiled; he recognized a kindred spirit.

"Did you ever try to convert the daughter?" he asked, after a pause.

Again the preacher flushed, and the lines on his face deepened.

"I've been thinking that over, and it seems as though that fit of mine was not a matter of yesterday, nor the day before nor the day before that. It's been coming on a long while, Griff, though I never guessed it till I saw her, winsome as a fairy, paddling in the beck. I *did* try to convert her, just once; but the words wouldn't come, and when she laughed, with a kind of coo at the tail of her voice, I fell soft and hadn't the

heart to upbraid her. Ay, Griff, it's been coming this long while."

"And the best thing that has come to you since you were born," cried Lomax, cheerily. "What with the girl, and enough to eat, and a rap over the knuckles now and then from me—for old times' sake, you know—we'll make a moor man of you yet, Gabriel. Do you ever feel the swish of a gale making you drunk?"

For a moment the preacher yielded to that storm-suggestion; his whole face lit up, his eyes sparkled.

"Yes, drunk. When the heather lies low against the peat, and the rain belches out of the sky—it's almost like freedom at times."

"You'll do," growled Lomax.

The light went out of Gabriel's eyes.

"But it's the old Adam; it has to be beaten under."

"I wish you'd let your old Adam alone a bit, Gabriel. He's not half as bad as some who followed him. Come for a ride to-night; the moon is at full, and Lassie is eating her head off in the stable."

"Yes, I'll come. It's good to have you back again, Griff."

"As good as to be back? I doubt it. I must be off now, anyway, or that mother of mine will be seeking me with a hunting-crop; I promised to take her for a walk this morning. It's a pity about the mill, Gabriel; I used to bathe regularly in the stream, and there is an end of that now; I was coming for a bathe when you ran into me yesterday."

"Shall you be going to see Miller Rotherson?" asked Gabriel, wistfully, as they stood at the gate.

"Of course, old fellow, if only to give him a helping hand; you're a terrible chap when you set your mind on conversion."

"Because if—if you liked me to go with you—I know them, you see."

"Yes, I see," smiled Griff. "All right; I'll call for you on the way."

The preacher's brow was clouded as he went back through the fading stocks and asters that lined the garden path.

"Just the same, just the same," he muttered; "when you're serious, a devil of passion, and when you're gay, a scoffer. But, God knows, lad, how I love you!"

"I'm late, mother," said Griff, rushing into the Manor parlour at his usual hurricane speed. "Old Gabriel has been in a poor sort of way, lately, and I had to bully him. Where are we going to-day?"

"Anywhere you like, Griff. Let us take the first path we come to, and go straight ahead. We won't bind ourselves to anything."

Every day since he returned, the mother and Griff had had a long walk together. The man's zest for the moors was increasing apace; the more heather he got, the more he wanted, and the two of them found so much to talk about, that Kate Strangeways, the quarry-master's wife, went clean out of the old lady's head. Their cross-country tramp this morning, however, chanced to bring them in sight of Peewit House.

"Were you ever in that house up there?" asked Mrs. Lomax.

"Never; but I have often thought of exploring it. Who lives there? Some one must do, as there is smoke coming out of the chimney."

"The worst-assorted couple you can imagine; a husband who ought to be horse-whipped every day of his life, and a wife who is, in my judgment, as fine a woman as I know anywhere. I want to drop in, by the way; Mrs. Strangeways has been ill for a long while, and I stop for a chat now and then. Will you come?"

"Of course I will. I happen to be in search of a type of the genuine moor woman, too, and perhaps she will oblige me."

"Griff, Griff! Always on the hunt for people to dip your brush into. I sometimes wish you were not quite so full of your work."

"It's all right, mother," laughed the other, as he made her

take advantage of his arm up the side of the brae; "I try to keep a tight hand on it, and only let it out when it *ought* to be let out."

But the laugh died on his lips: they were close to the bit of intake that guarded Peewit from the moor, and Kate Strangeways was leaning over the gate. Griff had dreamed of that pure-bred moor woman of his for many a year, and it seemed to him that he had found her at last in the flesh; she had the lissom strength of figure, the lips that were clear-cut for tenderness or scorn, the resolute hazel eyes, all just as he had imagined them.

"Mother, she is beautiful!" he whispered.

The old lady looked hard at him; then laughed, a dry, uncertain laugh.

"Let her be just a type, Griff, dear; don't dwell too much on the flesh and blood."

Once the first shock of surprise was over, Lomax was disposed to laugh at himself touching his half-second of emotion. He warmed to the thought of canvas and palette; he saw fine capabilities in the handling of this moor woman by a man who had the same peat salt in his fibres.

"Well, mother, I have my chance at last," he said, as they came away. "That type is absolutely new in art; I can only pray that I may not spoil her in the drawing."

Her laugh had no uneasiness in it now; she saw that Kate Strangeways, the actual, had very little to do with that swift light of enthusiasm on Griff's face.

"If you are a very good boy, I may bring you again—but I warn you that her husband is jealous; are you afraid for your skin, Griff?"

"Not I; I would not forego that model if there were fifty husbands, each with a hundred jealousies. When will you bring me again?"

"Just like your father, just! You must take life at a gallop. We will see; perhaps at the end of the week."

When Joe Strangeways went to the kitchen sink that night for his evening wash, Hannah, the maid of all work, took care

to be at hand. Hannah had lost no whit of her spite against her mistress, and she saw that something was to be made out of that morning's visit.

"It's a doiting bird 'at leaves its nest for another," she observed, polishing a knife on a leather board.

"If tha's getten owt to say, speak up, lass, an' doan't go dithering an' mumbling to thyseln."

"Mrs. Lummax war playing th' grand lady here again the morn."

"Oh, she war, war she? A limb o' th' devil, I call her, and a limb o' th' devil I say she is, choose who hears me. Hast 'a nowt else to say?"

"She warn't by herseln. That long-legged son of hers came along wi' her. Seems like as if he fancies hisseln, thinks hisseln fearful fine, wi' his Lunnon slithery spache; he'd mak a likely pair o' tongs, yon, I'm thinking."

"Lang i' th' leg an' short i' th' heäd, as t' saying is," chuckled Joe. "What wod my fine gentleman be after, think ye?"

Hannah tossed her head, and her thin black hair stood up straight from her forehead in token of outraged scruples.

"What should fine gentlemen be after, when they cross three miles o' moor to see a man's wife—and him away all th' day at th' quarries? Some fowk are fearful slow to see which way their noses point."

Joe reflectively washed the soap-suds from his face and buried his head in a towel. He was indebted to Hannah for a suggestion that might bear fruit in the near future.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE SIGN OF THE DOG AND GROUSE.

The bar of the Dog and Grouse hostelry at Ling Crag was very noisy on Wednesday night. The serving-maid was beginning to show signs of temper, for orders were being hurled at her with confusing rapidity, and with reiterated requests that she should hurry. From the girl's snappishness, and the density of the tobacco-smoke that filled the bar, an *habitué* of the inn could have guessed the time—close upon ten o'clock—with almost as much certainty as if he had used the ordinary form of chronometer.

The clatter of mugs, the burr of weather-roughened voices, ceased on a sudden. The men took their pipes from their mouths and gaped interrogatories one at the other. For they had heard a horse ridden up to the door at a gallop, and a stamp of feet on the sanded floor, and an abrupt demand on the part of some unknown male to see the landlord.

"Begow, there's summat agate!" said a burly carter. "What dost think it mud be, Jim?"

"Nay, how should I know?" muttered Jim, scratching his head.

"There's summat i' th' wind, for sure, but it's noan for me to say what it mud be."

"Murder, happen, or high treason, an' yon's a constable chap come i' search o' th' fugitive!"

This suggestion, made with an air of wise importance, came from the village cobbler.

A thrill went through the company. Murder was a fearsome thing, yet they knew exactly what it was; but that ingenious

touch of the cobbler's set their minds working on an unknown quantity. High treason might mean anything, and, "if it war, so to say, at their own doorstuns, a man mun look to hisseln and not be ower rash wi' his tongue."

So, in wonder and trepidation, they crowded to the door of the bar, the less valiant peeping over the shoulders, or between the arms, of their comrades in front. One and all felt aggrieved when the stranger, who was still standing in the passage, showed himself to be much like other men. He wore no special dress, save the customary one of a gentleman who has reached his destination on horseback, and there was about him no trace of any peculiar odour, such as might have been associated with high treason or other of the black arts. Furthermore, when the landlord at last stepped in from the mistal at the rear of the house, he was met by the commonplace request that he would get ready a room for the night. By dint of setting the serving-maid to sleep on a sofa downstairs —her ruffled temper was not soothed by the inconvenience— the landlord was able to oblige his guest, and the horse was led round to the stables.

The company in the bar returned to their mugs. They felt hurt that the stranger had offered so little excitement, though the cobbler hinted darkly that, when a man fell quiet-like and tried his hardest not to make a fuss, it was a safe thing to suspect him of having some deep-laid project on hand.

Perhaps the cobbler was right; but the stranger's plans, whatever they might be, seemed to be confined just now to the matter of substantial food. "Something hot, landlord, and plenty of it!" he said briskly. "I've ridden twenty miles since my last meal."

"Right, sir; I'll see to it. Will ye have it in this little room here, sir, or in th' kitchen? Th' kitchen is a sight snugger, and it's none ower warm at neets for th' time o' year."

"The kitchen, by all means. This way? Don't be long with the cooking, my friend, or I shall starve."

The stranger, who certainly found the Ling Crag temperature

none too high on this night of early September, retired to the ingle-nook after supper, and lit a pipe.

Ten sounded across the valley from Marshcotes parish church, and the occupants of the bar slouched out one by one; each, as he reached the passage, turned his eyes towards the kitchen.

"What's his business, think ye?" murmured Dick the cobbler.

The landlord, with his hand on the street door, grinned pleasantly. "Tha'rt a sight too curious, Dicky. Maybe he's some sort of a land-agent—Squire Daneholme's, happen. I remember, now I come to think, tha wert boasting a neet or two back about a matter of a hare—tha'd best be keeping a quiet tongue in thy heäd, Dick the Cobbler."

"Begow!" said Dick, laying an arm on his host's sleeve. "Dost 'a think that?"

"Out ye get, the lot of ye! Do ye think I want Constable Lee i' my public, an' th' magistrates on Friday?" cried Boniface, not heeding Dick's frightened appeal.

"Constable Lee knows which side on his mug th' beer is, and I'm thinking he'll noan be hard on ye," put in one of the departing crowd.

The landlord joined in the laugh that followed, and locked his door for the night. "He's a bit of a softy, is Cobbler Dick," he observed. "They're a sight too thin-skinned, this younger breed o' poachers. Well, well, I'd like to know, myseln, what the gent's business might be."

The landlord felt that he had a right to be the first recipient of any news whatsoever; for was he not named Jack o' Ling Crag, and had he not the reputation of being able to see further into the heart of a haystack than any man in the parish? They are much given, these dwellers on the uplands, to naming a man after the house or cottage in which he lives; and since the Dog and Grouse was in a sense—the most cheerful possible sense—the representative building of the village, Jack was accredited with the proudest surname a man could have up there.

And before another hour had passed, Jack did become partially enlightened as to the stranger's object in coming to Ling Crag. His visitor asked him to join him in a pipe, and he sat down on the other side of the hearth. They talked of indifferent topics for awhile—the crops, the grouse shooting, the fishing in Scartop Water—until the stranger turned abruptly in his seat.

"Do you know of a house to let anywhere near? I want to be out on the moors, and yet not too far from a village like this of yours."

"It's a bit o' shooiting, likely, ye'd be after?" insinuated the host.

The stranger paused a moment before replying, and smiled a little to himself. "Yes, that's just what I want—some good shooting. Any house will do, but it must have shooting attached to it."

The landlord already had his eye on exactly the place required, but he was not disposed to give away the situation too lightly; he felt that Ling Crag ought to uphold its motto of "keeping itseln to itseln."

"There's none too many houses hereabouts," he observed slowly; "and what there is is fearful sought after."

"Are they, now? I should have thought, being so far away from a town, and——"

"Ay, sir, but—begging your pardon—it's a fine thing to be able to say ye come fro' Ling Crag: there's a sort o' respect goes with th' name in fowks's minds, an' we stay on here fro' generation to generation, seeing as how we could nobbut exchange for th' war. An' that maks houses scarce, like."

The stranger, beginning to understand his man better, laughed easily. "I shall try to be worthy of the honour, landlord, if you'll only find me the house."

The host rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then slapped his thigh with a great show of impromptu delight.

"Now that's queer; all th' time ye've been talking I niver once thought o' Wynyates Hall. Why, it's just th' place for ye, sir; two score acre o' shooiting, an' a regular old-fashioned

sort o' house—just such as th' painter chaps come for to paint."

"That sounds all right. How far is it from here?"

"A mile an' a bittock; an' a good highroad from there to here. First ye pass Scartop Water—as I was telling ye about—an' then ye come right to Wynyates Hall, standing i' a bit o' wood of its own, wi' th' moors just aboon. Oh, ay, it's a grand place, is Wynyates!"

"Any houses near?"

"Well, there's what we call Wynyates hamlet a quarter-mile away, but it's nowt mich to crack on—just a two or three cottages an' a farm or so."

"It is to let, is it, this Wynyates Hall?"

"Ay, it's to let right enow, sir. But I mind me there's some queer tales abroad; happen ye're not feared o' ghosts?"

A shadow passed over the stranger's face, and seemed more at home there than his previous air of cheery carelessness. "Ghosts?" he muttered. "I've got too many of my own to be afraid of other people's." His face cleared again, and he laughed a denial at his host.

But the grizzled old man shook his head doubtfully.

"Best not laugh at 'em, sir, an' that's my belief," he said gravely. "There's been some fearful goings-on up at Wynyates. Two brothers there war lived up at th' Hall, an' they'd been trained in a school ye don't find i' these ower-eddicated days. Ay, they war of th' owd breed, for sure; as lusty an' devil-paced limbs as ye'd light on th' countryside through."

"You seem to be rather proud of them, if one may judge from the look in your eyes," said the stranger, breaking into a reflective pause on the part of his host.

Boniface chuckled.

"Well, the fact is, sir, they were a tidy pair at th' poaching, an' my heart allus did go out to a poacher, God bless 'em! I war fifty, an' they war nobbut a bit th' wrang side o' thirty i' those days, but I could teach 'em nowt—nowt at all. Sakes alive, they hadn't no call to poach! They'd plenty o' brass an' land o' their own; but it war just i' th' blood, so to say, an'

they did it for plain love o' sport. Ay, they war likely chaps, them two."

"And what was the end of them? End there must have been, or Wynyates would not be to let."

"To tell ye t' truth, sir, I doan't like to speak on it. They war i' drink one neet—summat about a woman, for young 'uns will be youngs 'uns th' world ower——"

"You're right there," interrupted the stranger, and shut his lips down on his tell-tale mouth.

His companion glanced shrewdly at him, but made no comment.

"As I war saying, they war i' their cups, an' they fell a-fighting. Th' younger he shied a brandy-bottle, an' caught t' other fair on th' forehead, an' killed him deäd as a door-nail. Then he hanged hisseln to one o' th' parlour rafters, an' that war th' end of th' owd family. Ay, sad, sad, for sure; but they war bonny lads at a bit o' poaching."

"And their ghosts haunt the old Hall?"

"So fowks say, an' I've no reason to doubt it. Dirt cheap th' owd place is going; for them two brothers, being Ling Crag born, doan't part in a hurry, an' they mak it fair too hot to bide in for them as comes to live there."

"They won't trouble me, at any rate. It will be a little excitement. What sort of ghosts are they?"

The landlord frowned on the other's levity, and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"They do say—and what am I to deny it?—that th' ghost o' th' brandy-bottle is th' hardest to bear; it shooits up i' th' air, an' dithers around, an' then strikes t' other ghost so as to bring a bloody stream from his forehead.—But idle chaps will allus be telling idle tales," he finished, replenishing his pipe.

The discrepancy between the opening of his speech and the finish was easily accounted for. Pride in the village ghost had led him on to wax eloquent in description, but monetary interest induced him not to put hindrances in the way of a good bargain. Doubtless there would be pickings for himself if his guest took Wynyates Hall.

A long silence followed.

"Ye come fro' th' low country, I'm thinking?" said Boniface at length.

"From—from the low country?" repeated the stranger.

"Ay—from t' South, as some fowk call it."

"Oh, yes, I'm from the South."

"I thowt as mich fro' your spache. Happen, then, ye'll know Miller Rotherson, what's ta'en th' mill i' Hazel Dene?"

"No, I don't know him."

The stranger was trying to realize a new point of view. Evidently the people of Ling Crag regarded themselves as one village, and the rest of England as another. They expected all South-country people to know each other, just as the landlord here knew Betty Binns, or Gabriel Hirst, or Dick the Cobbler. Such isolation took the stranger's breath away.

Another silence.

"I mind me that th' agent what looks after Wynyates Hall —an' a sight more property, too—comes here to-morrow to collect th' rents," said the landlord. "Him an' ye might come to an agreement."

"I think we might. What time is he due?"

"Fro' nooin onwards to six o' th' clock."

"Very well. Call me at nine, will you, and give me bacon and eggs for breakfast. It's high time we turned in."

The stranger took his candle and slowly mounted the stairs. As he went, he muttered softly to himself, "Such isolation—it is fatuous—it is magnificent. I have come to the right kind of place. Gossips, of course; but so there are everywhere. Do I know Miller Rotherson from the low country? Ha, ha!"

A draught at the stair-head blew out his candle, but the door of his room stood open, and a flood of moonlight came across the landing to show the way. He did not trouble to relight the candle, but clashed the door to after him and went to the uncurtained window. He had a clear view across the moors; one after another the dark rises swept to the broken sky-line, striding the misty hollows, till his eye caught that queer sense of *endlessness* which the moor people know from

their birth. His face went grey as he watched, and through the greyness leaped a wild expectancy. Like a boy this man of forty stretched out his arms to the heath, and talked as if it had ears to hear him. "Janet—I wonder if you're there. In the heart of the moor, you told me—it must be down in one of those white hollows." Then he paused, and his voice went out again in one yearning cry of "Janet!"

The stranger pulled himself together. He laughed bitterly, as men do who have once safely passed these things and find it hard to have to go back again. Then he kicked off his boots, undressed, and lay for an hour on his back, watching the moon through the window. *One* boomed from Marshcotes church, and every hollow of the moors seemed to catch the sound, to pass it on, till the heath was to the already dozing man one everlasting succession of striking clocks.

"Get to sleep, you fool!" he muttered drowsily. "Curse the bells—they sound uncanny; it'll be long before they ring for *that* wedding. God knows she's taken the heart clean out of my body—*one*, *one*, *one*; curse the bells!"

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING PARSLEY AND STRONG DRINK.

At eight of the next evening, Griff Lomax was surprised by a visit from the preacher—surprised, because only a few hours ago they had parted at the end of a long ride together.

Gabriel wore an air of clumsy craftiness which sat laughably ill upon him.

"It's time you paid your respects at the mill, don't you think?" he said, shifting from foot to foot.

"Oh, the wind blows there, does it?" laughed Griff, noting that the preacher's face was more carefully shaven than usual, and that he wore a shirt of fine linen.

"I know them, Griff, and you don't. It seems but neighbourly to go together."

"You saw her this afternoon, I fancy? Gabriel, boy, you're in a bad way. I have work to do; can't you wait till to-morrow?"

Lomax was in a teasing humour, and refused to take the preacher's—or any other—matters seriously.

"Well, of course—if you can't come," murmured Gabriel, with crestfallen looks.

"He can come, Gabriel; and, what is more, I shall see that he does," said Mrs. Lomax, who had entered unobserved.

Griff had given her a hint as to how matters stood, and the old lady was entirely of her son's mind, "that it would make a man of Gabriel."

Griff took his mother in both arms and lifted her as if she had been a baby.

"Oh, you threaten me, little mother, do you?" cried he looking fierce.

"Griff, what a boy you are—put me down again. I shall never be able to train you properly," she added whimsically. "I can't learn the trick of being angry with you."

"Honour thy father and thy mother," murmured Gabriel Hirst, scandalized for the hundredth time by Griff's relations with the old lady. "I wish Griff was more respectful."

The end of it was, of course, that Lomax set off with his friend. Through the churchyard they gained the moor, and thence struck across to the foot of Ling Crag village. The last of the sunset was dying over the heath, and something in the aspect of that well-loved country of his touched an inner chord in the preacher.

"It's sweet and clean, Griff," he said presently. "It seems to be telling me not to take shame if——"

He broke off there, and Griff supplied finish and answer alike in his brief, "You can believe it, Hirst."

They crossed the stile on their left, and pushed up the darkening valley. The stream brawled beside them; from a farm on the crest of the ridge came the clatter of milking-pails and the guttural cries of the farmer's men. The tail of a stiff west wind blew down the Dene, and Gabriel Hirst, for a few brief moments, threw his sins to the breeze and let it make what it would of them. But his heart misgave him when they stood at Miller Rotherson's door. The maid was long in responding to his knock, and his disquietude grew almost to a panic; he would have turned and fled, had he been alone.

Then, after Nancy had admitted them and shown them into the parlour where the miller was smoking his pipe, Gabriel could find no word to say, and Lomax had to take the initiative. Old Rotherson took stock of the stranger, decided that he liked the hang of him, and declared it was downright neighbourly to pay him a call in this way.

"Well," laughed Griff, "apart from anything else, I was curious to see the man who could make Dene Mill pay. When I was last at home the old place had been unlet for

years, and people said that the big millers near the towns had it all their own way nowadays."

"And there was no room for the smaller men, they told you? Oh, yes, they told me that tale, too, when I started here. They were wrong, Mr. Lomax. I said, the first time I saw the mill, that a man who could let all that water-power run to waste, day in and day out, deserved to starve. I trusted a little in Providence, and a good deal in my own head, and I got the place dirt cheap on a long lease. I supply half the countryside now, and am bidding fair to secure the other half. The big towns are too far from Marshcotes and Ling Crag and the scattered farmhouses that hug the moor."

"Providence, Mr. Rotherson——" Gabriel began, then stopped. His spiritual arguments grew tangled, for his carnal ear had detected the swish-swish of skirts along the passage.

"So this is Gabriel's lady," thought Lomax, as Greta came in, with a pretty bashfulness that suited her well. "There seems more excuse for his lunacy than there did."

"This is my little girl, Mr. Lomax," said the miller, with an explanatory wave of his churchwarden pipe.

Gabriel Hirst watched the girl's unformed bow, and the shy uplifting of her eyes to Griff's. A sudden pang struck through him, taking him unawares. Not till this moment had he seen his friend in the light of a possible rival.

Greta was perverse to-night. Instinctively she fell to comparing the little points of manner, dress, speech, in which the two men differed. She grew angry with the preacher for compelling such comparison; now and then she blushed for Gabriel Hirst, as she had not blushed when he came upon her with her little bare feet paddling in the water. She had taken the only vacant chair, which chanced to be close to Griff's: Hirst sat by the miller at the other side of the room, and tried to talk, listening eagerly the while for scraps of the conversation that was passing between the other two.

"And how do you like our wild country?" asked Griff, by way of making idle chit-chat.

Gabriel was in the middle of a polemical discussion with

old Rotherson, but he paused for Greta's answer. She glanced across at the preacher and saw that he was listening.

"Well enough," she said, with a toss of the head. "But the people are like the country—rather too wild, don't you think?"

The preacher writhed in his chair; it was a girl's unbalanced coquetry, yet it cut straight to his simple heart. And the two on the other side of the fireplace went on with their light talk, and Greta let no chance of a stab go by, knowing well that the man who presumed to care for her would hear her every word. Lomax, seeing by the man's face how things were going, strove to lead his companion into quieter channels; but her wit was nimble, and, no matter what the topic might be, she made it good for a covert gibe at Gabriel.

"Greta, lass, it's about time we had some glasses in," said the miller at length. "Smoking's dry work without a drop of whisky to help it down. You take a dram now and then, Mr. Lomax?"

"That I do."

"I thought you looked that sort, somehow," said the miller, with an involuntary glance at Gabriel.

When the whisky had been brought in, with icy, beaded water from the well-spring just without the house door; when old Rotherson had allowed his guest to mix him a glass, and had entreated him, with a jovial twinkle, "not to drown the miller;" when Griff had helped himself to a liberal half-and-half, which the strength of his head warranted—it occurred to Lomax to effect a redistribution of seats. Gabriel, seeing him hovering vaguely on the outskirts of the hearthrug, at length divined that he had an opportunity of sitting beside the girl; he moved clumsily across the floor, and Greta frowned as she watched him.

"I was at chapel on Sunday night," she observed.

"So I saw. Did you—did you——"

"Like your sermon?" she finished demurely. "I suppose I did, only—I was disappointed. You have such a reputation for—wildness—and I wanted to hear you really inspired."

The miller caught her words.

"Greta, don't be so forward with your tongue. It isn't fair to badger a man on a week-day about the work he does on Sunday."

"But Mr. Hirst badgers people on a week-day, father, about the things they *don't* do on Sunday. It's only tit for tat."

"God knows I mean it for the best," muttered Gabriel, too low for any but Greta to hear.

She glanced at him, and dropped her air of mockery. A softer light came into her grey eyes. Then again she looked across the hearth, and saw how at home the two men were with their pipes and glasses; and back her eyes travelled to the preacher, in his ill-cut clothes of black, glooming there with neither pipe in his mouth nor glass at his side, his hands sitting lonely on his knees. "If only he weren't such a *woman*," she murmured, and rose to bid them all good night.

Gabriel sat in his corner, after she had gone, without word or motion. He felt like one who has sold his soul to the devil, and been cheated of his price at the end of it all. Where was the swift enthusiasm for the Word that had braced him to ten years of fervid preaching? Gone. Where was his feud with the flesh? Swallowed up in the depths of two grey eyes. What had he gained? Scorn that was harder to bear than sin, mockery which no wrestling with the Adversary had taught him how to parry.

Griff, meanwhile, talked glibly to the miller, hoping to cover his friend's moroseness.

"There is land attached to the mill yet? Do you farm it, as your predecessor did?"

Old Rotherson smiled grimly.

"Yes, I farm it—after a fashion. But it's sadly like trying to skin a flint, as the saying goes. You've a hard country up here, Mr. Lomax."

"For grass, yes. But we're fine when it comes to growing heather."

"And what good is heather, I'd like to know?" quoth the practical miller. "It will make a broom to sweep my floors

with, but what else can you do with it? There's one other thing that grows well hereabouts, though; one of my fields is as full as it will hold of parsley, and I can't make it out. Never a bit of parsley-seed have I sown; yet up it comes as if the seed had been raining from the sky."

Griff chuckled, and his host glanced at him inquiringly.

"Hares are very fond of parsley; wonderfully fond," murmured the younger man, with a sly look in his eyes.

"Well, so they are. Only last night I was looking out of my bedroom window, and I counted five all at once in the field. But that doesn't help me to know how the parsley came there."

"It *is* curious," said Griff. But he hinted never a word of the old-time nights when he and Jack o' Ling Crag had gone out salting their neighbours' fields with parsley-seed.

They rambled on from this topic to that, till they were startled by a mighty sob that came from across the hearth. Gabriel Hirst, wrapped all this while in his own miserable thoughts, had instinctively given vent to the despair at his heart.

"Nay, nay, lad," said the miller, kindly. "You're overwrought a bit. Take a drop of strong drink, and you'll see the world in a better light." He got up from his armchair, and poured out a tolerable measure of the spirit, never stopping to think that his goodwill might be misdirected. The preacher took the glass from his hands.

"I wouldn't, if I were you, old fellow," interposed Lomax; "you're not used to it, and——"

But a devil had come into Gabriel's eyes.

"I'll go my own way," he said sullenly, and swallowed the tumblerful in three big gulps. They said good night to the miller soon after—it was past eleven—and the preacher's step was uneven as he left the room.

The mill stream was dancing with the moonbeams through Hazel Dene, but Gabriel was in no humour to mark such trivial beauty. He stopped when they reached the little pool with the pine-log on its bank. He gripped Lomax's arm and gazed into his face.

"She was mine that day, Griff Lomax. I wish to God I'd never brought you here, to spoil a blessed Sabbath's work."

"Man, you're a fool. Come home to bed, before you pick a quarrel with some one who is *not* your friend."

"Friend? Yes, and a pretty friend you've shown yourself." A hiccough had intruded itself into the preacher's voice, as the fresh air made headway with the whisky. He laughed like a madman, and sat himself down heavily on the log. "The flesh, the flesh, the flesh!" he yelled, with a hiccough between each word. Then he fell to crooning like a child; he tucked his sable legs under him, and swore that the preacher was topping the rise on the opposite side of the stream. Finally, he rose from his seat, and regarded the other with grave inquiry. "Why does the stream want to get to the sea?" he demanded. "The ways of the Lord are surely strange?"

"I give it up, old chap. Come home to bed, I tell you."

Griff threaded his arm through Hirst's, and led him, steadier on his feet now and meek as a lamb, to his own door. Latches were unknown in Ling Crag, but the preacher always carried the door-key with him; he was often abroad at nights, and neither Betty Binns nor her husband, who slept in the house, could be expected to wait up for him at these times. Gabriel Hirst made two or three ineffectual assaults on the door, then handed the key to Lomax.

"Griff," he said, with unsober cunning, "I'm a sinful man, and vengeance shall come like a thief in the night—but I shouldn't like Betty to hear. Help me to bed, Griff, for old times' sake."

When Lomax came out into the moonlight again, after locking up the house and pushing Gabriel's key under the mat, the smile on his lips was a tender one. "The pace is a bit swift for old Gabriel nowadays," he muttered. "He's been drunk for the first time in his life, and in love for the first time. It will do him good in the long run, because there's solid bottom under that hysterical piety of his. But, Lord, what a time of retribution he will make for himself!"

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He strolled along the highroad in the direction of Wynyates: the night was calm, and he felt in no humour to return. Greta and her queer, two-sided lover slipped gradually from his mind, and Kate Strangeways, his treasure-trove, took their place. His pulses quickened, with a passion that was entirely artistic; this moor woman, as he saw her now, was a being wonderful, remote, magnificent; he almost feared to handle her, lest he should spoil her in the drawing. Yet he must certainly ask her to sit to him, whether he made the best of his chances or not. He turned at last and started home at a brisk pace. At the door of the Dog and Grouse he espied the landlord, swallowing a mouthful of fresh air before he turned in for the night.

"Good night to you, Mr. Lummax," called Jack o' Ling Crag.

"Hallo, Jack! I thought you'd be in bed long ago."

"Well, so I should be, sir, in a orn'ary sort o' way. But things hes been happening, sir—such things as keep a plain man out o' bed thinking on 'em."

Griff cocked his head a little on one side, and gave Jack a look which suggested that some kind of Freemasonry existed between them.

"Have you been taking a little midnight exercise, Jack? I feared they'd catch one or both of us many a time last year."

Jack o' Ling Crag gurgled complacently.

"Nay, now, Mr. Lummax, is it likely 'at they'd nobble an owd bird like me wi' gamekeeper chaff? It's all right, I says, an' none 'ud deny it, that chaps like Dick the Cobbler should be cotched: they're green hands meeting green hands—for all th' owd lot o' keepers, an' a smart set they war, is gone—an' it's a toss up whether it ends in th' coort-house for Dicky an' his mates, or i' broken heäds for th' keepers. But me—Lord, sir, I thowt ye knew me better nor to go thinking owt o' that sort!"

"Still," said Griff, with a slow, retrospective smile, "still, we ran it pretty close that night in Birch Wood. Do you remember? By Jove, but it was sport!"

"I remember varry weel, Mr. Lummax; for that war th' first

time I felt sartin sure ye'd getten a heädpiece on your shoulders —ay, lad, your father's heädpiece. It do seem queer," he added, meditatively, "that even th' gentry up hereabouts is allus itching for a bit o' poaching. There war old Tom Hirst, now; he war a regular nipper afore religion stuck in his gizzard an' choked th' life out on him. Mony's the time—— But it gets chilly, like, standing i' th' road. What say ye to a glass o' th' blend 'at a two or three on us knows about?"

"I say that nothing would suit me better, if our friend Lee has not grown wide-awake since I used to know him."

"I've a great respect for Constable Lee, sir," observed Jack, gravely, as he led the way indoors, "an' Constable Lee hes an ekal respect for Jack o' Ling Crag. We've niver hed a wrang word sin' a little scrape 'at it took me all my time to get him clear of: he's a man what bears gratitude, an' ye may tak my word for that."

"And, in any case, I'm coming in as your guest. Bless me, it's odd if a respectable innkeeper can't entertain a friend to a glass of whisky."

"That's so, sir; an' proud to be named your friend."

"About this matter that has been keeping you out of your bed?" said Griff presently, holding his glass to the light and looking through it with the eye of a man on whom good drink is not wasted.

"Oh, that? It's nowt so varry special, when all's said; only it's not ivery day 'at a gent comes to Ling Crag a-house-hunting—nor ivery twelvemonth that he leaves a ten-pun note behind him."

"And who was he? From these parts?"

"Nay, he war fro' th' low country; as to his name, I mind me now he niver mentioned it. At after he'd had a bite o' supper, he asks me fair an' square if I could light my eye on a likely house i' th' neighbourhood; he wanted a bit o' shooiting, said he. Well, I bethowt me o' Wynyates, an' telled him 'at th' agent war coming this varry morn to collect his bits o' rents; an' what does my gentleman do but settle it all right off wi' th' agent, an' gi'e me a ten-pun note—to settle his bill wi', as he

put it. Then, sooin as he'd settled about a couple o' rooms being got ready i' th' Hall afore th' week war out, off he rides again to Saxilton."

"Saxilton? What should he find to do in Saxilton?"

"Nay, that I can't say, save that he'd left some traps there an' wanted to fetch 'em. Summat a bit queer-like, eh, i' sich a whirlwind o' a man coming to Wynyates?"

"It does seem odd. I say, Jack, we'll have a night at his game some time; it's a year and three months since we went out together, and that is fifteen months too long."

"Well, if it's all th' same to ye, Mr. Lummax, I'd rather tak th' Squire o' Saxilton's game: he niver give me nowt, didn't Squire, save a cut on th' side o' th' heäd wi' his riding-whip; there warn't no bank-notes parted company wi' *him*."

This was a touch of morality that tickled Griff mightily.

"The old Squire is that kind of man," he laughed. "If he takes to a man, he can't do too much for him; but if he doesn't——"

"The Lord help him!—He's a rough customer, is Roger Daneholme: I reckon ye'll know him?"

"Only by repute. Perhaps you'll introduce me some night, Jack?"

"Happen I will, sir—wi' the stock of a gun for salute. What!—going? Well, good neet, sir; good neet."

CHAPTER VI.

THE RISING WIND.

They dined in the middle of the day at Marshcotes Manor, and they dined well. Mrs. Lomax, consequently, liked to have a clear hour's sleep in the afternoon—a luxury which Griff made the basis of one of those tender little accusations that were constantly passing between mother and son.

"And now, I suppose, you will want to *reflect* for awhile," he said, when Thursday's dinner was over and Mrs. Lomax had risen from the table.

"You need not put that ironical emphasis on the 'reflect,' Griff. I want to sleep, and am not ashamed to confess it."

"Yet you grumble when my work takes me away from you. I'm going to be jealous, too: I grudge you that wasted hour."

"Foolish boy! You may kiss me, if you like, just as a bribe to get rid of you. There, there; away you go. Are you going to ride?"

"Yes; for an hour or so."

"Of course. If it is not your ridiculous work that stands in the way, then you must needs rush off to the stable. It is lucky for me, Griff, that I *can* sleep with such a thankless son on my conscience."

"Talk to Lassie about it, mother: she will have exercise, and no one but I can manage her properly. That's what I like about the mare; she is twice as faithful as any woman I have come across—except my mother."

Mrs. Lomax frowned, a real frown; she did not like Griff's occasional flippancies about women.

"I think, boy, if you had stayed at Marshcotes, your

opinions might have kept more wholesome. Your south-country women must be curious, Griff."

He smiled a little at her prejudices, and patted her on her rough grey hair, and went out. But a cloud was on his face as he mounted Lassie, standing saddled at the door.

"I think," he murmured, "that if mother knew about Sybil Ogilvie, and the dance she led me, she would never speak to me again."

The blood rushed hot to his cheeks, and Lassie was surprised by an impatient jerk of the snaffle. She would stand a good deal from Griff, but an unprovoked assault of this kind, before ever they had cleared the garden gravel, was too much for any mare of good breeding. She shook her head just once, and tore through the open gate like a thing bewitched.

"I hope he won't break his neck; it is rather a failing in the family," sighed Mrs. Lomax, patiently, as she watched him down the highroad.

Griff soon brought the mare to reason, and explained to her that, having lately dined, he was in no mood for such violent exercise. Lassie took this as an apology and forgave him; and they ambled contentedly round by Ling Crag, Wynyates, and back again. As they were crossing the moor close to Marshcotes, Griff espied a tall figure making towards them. It proved to be Kate Strangeways, returning from the village grocery with a well-filled basket. He drew rein and slipped off his nag.

"You're looking tired," he said, in his direct way, with a keen glance at her face.

"I am tired, but it can't be helped. I think I'm falling lazy nowadays, Mr. Lomax."

"Lazy? Well, if you like the word. Mother tells me a different tale. You're coming to have tea with us before you walk the three miles back to Peewit."

She coloured slightly.

"Oh, no, thank you! It's time I was home."

"Nonsense!" put in Griff, brusquely. "I say you are coming."

"Up here we are not accustomed to being ordered about," said Kate, between vexation and amusement.

"Except by one of your own kind. Come, Mrs. Strangeways, I'm moor-born, too, and you know what that means. I intend to have my way."

She gave in at last, and it was not until they struck the village that Griff bethought him there was a certain oddity in the situation. When they reached the Manor, he learned from Rebecca that Mrs. Lomax had been called out to see some sick body in the village; and he was rather sorry that he had given his off-hand invitation to Kate Strangeways. He told Becky, however, to bring in the tea, and speedily found himself launched into such a brisk discussion that he entirely forgot his mother's absence. They got, by a round-about route, to literature, and from that to some books which Griff had lately lent her. They were all novels of the day, some of them written by friends of his own, and he had thought them exceedingly good when he had first read them. Griff knew that Kate and his mother had been friends for a long while past, yet it staggered him a little to discover that this wife of a master-quarryman was capable, not only of reading, but of digesting, the novels he had lent her.

"I don't understand story-writing," she explained, with a half-hesitating air. "I only know about the life we live, all of us; and that is a different thing."

He looked hard at her, with a puzzled air.

"It ought not to be. What these men are striving for, they would tell you, is to get life *as it is*. They seemed to me to ring true when I read them." Yet he faltered on the words. To what did they ring true, he could not help asking himself? To the falsity he had cherished through ten long years of his life, answered conscience. But he was stubborn: it was one thing for him to ridicule his late acquaintances, and quite another to listen to some one else doing the same; from sheer contrariety he grew warm in defence of the novels.

"But those books—you won't think me silly, Mr. Lomax?

you are so much cleverer—they don't describe women, as I know them."

Kate, too, was holding her ground, despite a feeling that this argumentative being must know a hundred times as much as she did about the art of character-drawing.

Griff got up and leaned against the mantelshelf. He was nettled. It was all so true, he felt—and it was bitter to have to admit that this woman, whom he had vaguely patronized as affording a valuable model, should be able to tell him what it had taken him so long to learn.

"I—I thought they did," he said lamely.

"Of course, you know best. Only they seem to me either too good or too bad—and far too clever. There isn't one real *heart-sob* in all these books—and women, God knows, live by heart-sobs in real life."

She remembered herself at that, and flushed. It was too easy to forget how clever Mr. Lomax was, and she was surely a very silly woman. But Griff knew she was right; he said nothing for that very reason, because he felt so cross.

Then the mother came in, and smothered her surprise at finding the two of them chatting so snugly together, and gave Kate a hearty welcome.

"Mrs. Strangeways has been abusing my judgment of women," laughed Griff, his good temper restored.

Kate tried to expostulate, but Mrs. Lomax cut her short.

"Quite right, my dear, quite right. All Griff's pet women are like dough that has been badly kneaded. I tell him so, often, and he doesn't half like it. Perhaps he took it more kindly from you?"

"I say, two to one! This isn't fair," protested her son.

"You will weather the storm, Griff," retorted the old lady, imperturbably. "After all, you have made a name for yourself; a knowledge of women was not necessary there. The whirr of a gale across the heather carried you through; you forgot your weaknesses sometimes."

"Would you like some tea, mother?" ventured Griff, mildly.

When Kate Strangeways finally rose to go, Lomax insisted

on "setting her on her way." "I'll go agatards wi' ye," he laughed, translating his intentions into the language of the country, as he loved to do when talking to Mrs. Strangeways.

Kate, laughing too, congratulated him on his knowledge of the tongue, and they set off in high good spirits. He did not leave her till they reached the top of the last rise that lay between themselves and Peewit House; and when they said good-bye, he had secured a half-promise that she would sit to him for her portrait.

A surly-looking rascal, with a beard an inch long and a cutty pipe rammed tight in one corner of his mouth, was leaning over the fence; Lomax judged him to be a farm-hand, said his farewells to Kate, and set off back across the moor.

"Well, I'm beggared!" muttered Joe Strangeways, removing the cutty pipe from his jaws.

Griff went to look up his friend the preacher on the following afternoon. He found him in a state of wild self-castigation. Gabriel's eyes were far too bright, and his fingers twitched to the tune of each fresh thought. That marvellous straightforwardness of his came to the front at once.

"Well, Griff, lad, I was drunk the night before last."

"Not quite that, old fellow; a bit bothered by the road, that's all; it's not an easy path through Hazel Dene."

"I was drunk, I tell you. Yes, and I was mortal sick in the night, Griff. But it wasn't the sickness of the carnal body I cared for; the trouble went deeper than that."

"Your head was bad the next morning?" queried Griff, innocently.

"Man, yes! But it's not that I mean. Think of the sin: think of a preacher of God's word showing himself no more than a cutting from the old stock." This was Gabriel's unconquerable pride coming out; he was humble in theory only.

"When you've understood that a little better," said the other gravely, "you'll be fit to preach. Good-bye, old chap; just ponder on that for a while. When are you coming for another ride?"

The preacher looked through and beyond his friend.

"I never thought to come to this. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Look here," he broke off, with a sudden flash of fury, "they say that the Lord looks after His own. Well, I don't believe it. Why did He bring that girl across my path?"

"To make a man of you," said Griff, and vanished.

Betty Binns was lying in wait for him without. A subdued exultation was visible in her face.

"I war sure, Mr. Lummax," cried she—"I war sure ye didn't rightly know what war good for th' innards of a man o' God. Th' maister, yester-morn, war as yaller as hen-corn, an' his heäd warked fit to burst. *That's* what comes along o' strong meät when th' Sperrit hes hold on a man."

"Betty," said Griff, "you mustn't be hard on me. I meant it for the best."

"Ay, ay, them as is for meaning th' best is allus for doing th' worst!" And Betty was retiring in triumph, when the other called her back.

"Just tell your master, will you, that I shall be here at nine sharp to-morrow night, and shall expect him to be ready for a ride. You have no objection to offer, have you, Betty?" he added, with an air of humble deference.

"Get along wi' ye! There's no mak o' shame i' th' young fowk nowadays, no shame at all. It taks a likelier nor ye, Mr. Griff, to trail Betty Binns. Now, will ye let me shut th' door, or willun't ye?"

"Parting, Betty, is such sweet sorrow, that I——?" He found himself talking to the bare oak of the door, and laughed mightily, in his boy's way, as he swung down the garden-path and into the highroad.

Remembering, later in the evening, that his whisky had run out, he slipped across to the Bull to buy a bottle. A crowd of idlers was hanging about the steps, with Joe Strangeways conspicuous in their midst. Joe was in his usual condition of semi-drunkenness, and he scowled on seeing Lomax approach.

"That's him," muttered a companion; "tha wert talking

big, Joe, about what tha'd do to him when tha cotched him. Now's thy chance." The tone was ironical, and did not suggest any great confidence in the quarryman's practical bravery.

Strangeways felt that he must make a demonstration of some kind, in view of a few recent utterances of his. He squared his shoulders so as to dispute possession of the doorway, thrust out his lower jaw, and regarded Griff with an air of sullen mockery.

"There's a saying, Griff Lummax, that lang i' th' leg spells soft i' th' heäd," he observed, repeating his favourite little pleasantry.

A chuckle sounded from the bystanders. Griff stopped on the lowest step, took his pipe out of his mouth, and regarded Strangeways with an air of quiet gravity; when he spoke, it was with a good Yorkshire brogue that not one of the bystanders could have bettered.

"There's another saying, mate. Lang i' th' drink spells short i' th' wit."

A big laugh went up at that. They were fond of Griff at Marshcotes, and they liked to find him ready with his tongue. Joe's face grew red, with a dash of purple about the gills. He had nothing to say, so confined himself to filling the doorway a little more completely.

"I want to pass," said Griff.

"Oh, tha dost, dost 'a? Well, it's gooid for young 'uns to want."

"I want to pass," repeated Griff.

"So tha said," responded the quarryman, emboldened by the other's quietness. "And how if tha'rt not going to be let pass?"

Griff said not another word, but took the four steps in one easy bound, twisted Joe round in his hands, set his foot to the man's heel and his right arm to his chest, and lowered him gently to the ground, where he lay with his feet on the threshold and his head on the bottom step. Then he went indoors and did his business.

"It's time tha wert wending home, Joe," suggested one

of the crowd. "It taks a likelier nor thee to tackle Griff Lummax."

"Lang i' th' leg, an' strong i' th' arm," laughed another.

Joe, having got to his feet again, shambled off towards the churchyard gate.

"Bide a bit, lads," he growled. "Bide till I've getten my fist round th' heft of a knife, and I'll cut th' bleeding heart out on him."

Lomax, unaware of Joe's delicately-expressed intentions, sketched the adventure to his mother when he got back, and wondered what particular quarrel the man had with him.

"What was he like, Griff?" asked Mrs. Lomax.

"Oh, I don't know. Short and thickset, with a stubbly chin and a beery eye."

"Would you like to know who he is?"

"I should, rather. I don't seem to remember his face a bit, and I prided myself on knowing all the moorside."

"He is Joe Strangeways—your moor woman's husband."

"Nonsense, mother! It can't be."

"Haven't they taught you, Griff, during all those years you have been away, that there is no such word as 'can't'? He *is* her husband."

Griff kicked the fender, for no apparent reason, and brought down the fire-irons with a rattle.

"But, mother—he was a brute—a drunken beast—a——"

"That does not alter facts, though, does it? I know Joe Strangeways very well, Griff; I had to teach him a lesson once."

She told him of that afternoon when she had gone to meet the quarryman on his return from work and had given him "a piece of her mind." Griff laughed rarely at the fierceness of this mother whom he was wont to tease beyond all limits of endurance. But he went out presently, and his step was heavy; he felt angry with Kate Strangeways because she had descended to the level of this unshaven clown. It was the first bit of real feeling he had experienced towards the woman who had heretofore struck him in the light of a valuable model.

CHAPTER VII.

'TWIXT WYNYATES AND LING CRAG.

It was nine o'clock of the next evening when Lomax, remembering his arrangement with the preacher, went to saddle his good mare Lassie. Lassie had almost forgotten what a gallop was like during the year that her master had been away from Marshcotes. The preacher came now and then to give her a turn, and the groom took perfunctory rides on her, but none save Griff could move the mare to the least show of enthusiasm. Gabriel thought her a dull nag, and wondered what Lomax saw in her; the groom voted her "a quarrelsome, skew-natured beast"; but Lassie could do a good deal when she felt Griff's legs astride of her and knew that it was worth while.

She whinnied, and arched her black neck, and kicked splinters out of her stall, when Griff came to her to-night.

"We're off for a scramble, old girl," he explained. And the mare, who had long ago guessed as much, almost harnessed herself, so eager was she to be off.

She didn't want to pull up at Gabriel's door, but a touch of the curb gave her a broad enough hint that she was to subdue inclination for once. The preacher came to the gate; he looked worth two of his usual self, what with the light of anticipation in his face, and the spick-and-span riding togs which replaced his sober gear of the morning.

"Are you ready?" Lomax shouted.

"Ay, and waiting," answered Gabriel, in a clear, ringing voice. "The chestnut has been saddled this half-hour past."

Away they went at a swinging pace along the good hard road that leads across the Lancashire border. They rattled

down the hill and up again on the other side, past the wooded rise where Wynyates hamlet looks over Scartop Water. They slackened half-way up the hill, and Griff jerked his whip towards Wynyates Hall as they went by.

"A fine old place, that. It's taken at last, so Jack o' Ling Crag tells me."

"Taken, is it? I wouldn't change places with whoever is going to live there," muttered the preacher.

"Why, Hirst, I believe you're as bad as the rest of them. Do you put your trust in that ridiculous ghost of a brandy-bottle which Jack is always talking about?"

"There were men who came to an evil end up there," said Gabriel, slowly, "and it stands to reason they won't rest quiet in their graves." He drew his horse close up to Lassie, and peered into Griff's face. "Lad, it's all very well to talk and laugh and joke when you're above ground: but what is it when you've got six feet of earth above you, and there comes a rap-rap at the coffin-lid, and you ask who's knocking—and a voice comes out of the blackness and whispers of Judgment Day—and your body is mad to move, and can't—and your spirit breaks clean through for very suffering, and walks the earth till the world's end, thinking on the vengeance of the Lord——"

Griff looked out over the moor, quiet as death, with the moonlight dappling the hollows, and the road stretching on, on before him, a streaky grey, far as the silent sky. He trembled at the preacher's imagery; ghosts and another world seemed the only realities in this night-girdled land. Then he felt the mare's belly under his legs, and the breath of life in his body.

"Gabriel," he laughed, "you've got a fine imagination. Damn your superstitions!"

"Lad, you're over proud in your strength of limb," groaned Hirst. "Give a thought to the soul that can be burned in hell fire for ever——"

"I won't!" snapped Griff, digging his heels into Lassie.

Both riders and horses were content to take things easily by the time they re-passed Wynyates. The exercise had driven

out half Gabriel's morbid fancies, and his thoughts were set on Greta.

"Griff," he ventured at last; "have you seen the miller lately?"

"Yes—and the miller's daughter, too; which is more to the point, I take it. I looked in this morning on my way through Hazel Dene."

A long silence. A light that was not of spiritual worries came into the preacher's face—a hot, ugly light of jealousy.

"She's a lass in a thousand, Griff, and you're a better man to look at than I; do you mean to play me false?"

"Gabriel Hirst, if you want me to think you drunk again, go on in that strain," cried the other, harshly.

Gabriel winced.

"Sober or drunk, lad, I fear you," he said, quietly.

"Then you're a fool for your pains. Haven't I eyes in my head, old chap? Didn't I watch you two the other night, and see the hide-and-seek in her eyes, and hear her cut you to ribbons with her little red tongue?"

"What of that? I don't see that it helps me."

"No, of course you don't see, because you know as much of women as you did the day you were born. It means just this—you can go in and win her. Only you won't; you're so damnably humble in the wrong places, and cock-a-whoop when soberness would fit you better."

"Do you mean that, Griff? Do you think—nay, nay, it's too good; it can't be. She as much as tells me I'm a canting fool—and sometimes she almost makes me believe it," he added reflectively.

"Do you good. What an ass you are, old fellow, somehow."

The preacher bit his lip, and seemed minded to retort; but he thought better of it, and struck off into a fresh channel of talk.

"There are changes in the countryside," he ventured presently. "The old mill is taken, Frender's Folly is taken, and now Wynyates——"

"Frender's Folly let?" echoed Griff. "I thought it was past hope by this time. Who has taken it?"

"Some sporting chap that has his pockets lined with gold."

"Frender's pockets were lined with gold, too, when he set out to build the Folly. I wish to the deuce these foreigners would spend their money elsewhere, instead of building palaces in the middle of the moor; the moor doesn't want them."

"*Foreigners*, Griff?" said the preacher, with a good, hearty laugh. "It's easy to tell that you come from hereabouts."

"Well, so they are foreigners. What does a moor house want with a couple of ball-rooms, terraces and gardens and hot-houses? Thank goodness, it lies outside Marshcotes moor, at any rate; they must make the best of it on the Cranshaw side."

"Captain Laverack—the man who's taken it—has a daughter, and they say she is pretty to look at," observed Gabriel, after another long pause.

Griff laughed to himself; he could read very clearly what was in the preacher's mind—his clumsy attempt to divert his rival's attentions to other quarters.

"Oh, has he? Does she ever stray as far as Ling Crag?"

"Now and then she rides this way. There's something queer about the business—so folk say—for the lass goes about with a face as long as a fiddle, and now and then she rides her horse shamefully hard, as if the devil was in her. Month in and month out they live at Frender's Folly, the girl and her father, and never get away for a holiday, as great folk mostly do."

"Gabriel, it does one good to hear you talking gossip! Man, you're changing in spite of yourself."

"I was thinking," went on Gabriel, in his honest, stubborn way, "that perhaps she is not as happy as she might be, and—it's time you were settled in life, Griff."

The other did not reply. His eyes went out across the moor again. The preacher's homely phrase had brought a host of sudden longings to the front. *Settled in life*, he muttered to himself; was that what was amiss with him?

Then the thought of Kate Strangeways came to him—the picture of her husband, as he had last seen him with his head on the flagstones of the Bull doorway—the quick understanding that he had met no other woman who could grip his fancy just as Kate did. Then he remembered the husband again.

"Don't talk rot," he said, and fell into silence.

Another horseman showed round the bend in the road that hid Ling Crag. He drew rein as he neared them.

"Can you direct me to Wynyates?" he asked.

Griff started and looked at the stranger's face twice before he could make up his mind on some question suggested by the voice and figure. He put out his hand at last.

"Why, Roddick!" he cried. "How the mischief do you come to be scouring the country at this time of night?"

"What, it's never you, Lomax? Here, let me get a closer look at your face. By the powers it is, though! You've pulled me up with one question, and I'll pull you up with another; how the mischief do *you* come to be here?"

"I live here; and that is more than you can say for yourself, at any rate," Griff chuckled.

"There you're wrong, my boy. I've taken Wynyates, and am at this moment on my way to it."

"Then, why ask your road? You didn't take the place on trust, did you, without ever seeing it?"

"Yes, but I did. The road seemed as plain as a pikestaff, while the landlord at the inn there was giving me directions; but these bothersome moors of yours put a man off—from sky-line to sky-line they never vary, and they upset one's notions confoundedly."

Lassie began to show signs of impatience; she wanted to be back in her stall again, and it did not fit with her ideas of good sense that her master should keep her waiting while he talked to a casual stranger on the highroad.

"All right, Lassie, all right," said Griff; "a mile or two out of our way, and then home in good earnest. I'll see you as far as Wynyates, Roddick." Then, remembering the preacher,

"Hirst, you won't mind my leaving you here? We must have another ride before long."

"As soon as you like, old fellow; it has done me a world of good," returned the preacher, cheerily.

"Now, Roddick, what on earth brings you here?" said Griff, as they went down the hill.

"Honours easy," retorted the other nonchalantly. "I thought you were in town, at the tail of Sybil Ogilvie; what brings *you* here?"

"Sybil Ogilvie herself, and a longing for fresh air." There was a testiness in Griff's voice.

"Ah—she played a little *too* fast and loose with you, did she? Well, I commend your sense, Lomax; she was worth about as little as any woman I ever saw, and that is saying a good deal."

"You still don't tell me why——"

"A longing for fresh air—and a few other trifles with which I won't burden you just now. Enough that I'm here, and here I mean to stay until it pleases Providence to kick me out."

"Then you've given up London, and political economy, and the writing of tracts for the People?"

"Yes, the whole lot. Political economy palls after fifteen years of it, and Socialism is stale. I have taken a turn for sport, and that's the truth of it; they tell me there is good shooting to be had round about Wynyates."

Roddick's face wore a guilelessness that was far from convincing his companion.

"I don't believe a word of it. You always were a secretive beggar, Roddick; if you won't tell me your motive, though, you won't, and there's an end of it. You're looking seedy," he added, taking a long look at his face.

"Possibly; it would be funny if I didn't.—Is this Wynyates? The place looks gloomy enough, in all conscience."

"Yes, that's Wynyates. Are you afraid of ghosts, by the way? They are said to simply swarm hereabouts."

"So I've been told. Let 'em swarm." Roddick dropped

his exaggerated listlessness; he leaned over to Griff, just as the preacher had done not long ago. "Lomax," he said, gruffly, "have you ever *touched* a ghost—not a filmy white affair, decently clothed, but a sort of hag from hell-pit, with lips that are wet and cling, and a body that—ugh! Don't babble to me about your country ghosts; they fight with a brandy-bottle, don't they, that pretty pair of brothers in there? Well, they can fight till Doomsday, for all I care. You don't mind good clean ghosts when once you have seen what I see every other day or so."

"Roddick," said Griff, slowly, "it is no affair of mine, I suppose, but you're in a bad way. The man who just left us is great on hell-pit and these sinuous terrors of yours; I'm trying to bring him round to sanity."

Roddick gave a great guffaw, and set his voice to a rasping shout.

"You baby, you unutterable fool, to come and preach sanity to me, after your Samson-and-Delilah farce with Sybil Ogilvie! I believe in my ghost, I tell you, because it won't let me forget; go home to your bed, and pray for experience."

Griff sat quietly in his saddle; he was undismayed by the outbreak, though Lassie was growing restive again.

"Damned hospitable you are," he murmured.

The other came to himself.

"Come in, and have something to drink. I told the old ruffian at the inn to send me some whisky, and if he's failed me, we'll amuse ourselves by going back and breaking his senile neck."

"You can, if you like," grinned Lomax, as he slipped out of the saddle; "for my part I would rather tackle Jack o' Ling Crag another day. Wait till you have seen him with two keepers in front, and three more coming up hot-foot behind him."

"Have you?" Roddick demanded, turning sharp on his heel.

"Well, once or twice; and we licked them all to pieces."

"I didn't think you had it in you. That Ogilvie woman must have rotted you more than we dreamed of. You really are a bit of a man, are you, Lomax?"

"Just a bit, when the fit is on me. Moonlight seems to be good for your temper, by the way; I wish you would not be so absurdly polite, Roddick."

Griff had thought little of the preacher's gossip touching Frender's Folly; but as he rode home from Wynyates, in the small hours of the morning, the name of its new owner came to his mind, and stuck there with irritating persistency; there was some elusive, half-remembered association with the name, but he could not focus it. The matter was still troubling him — as trifles sometimes will — when he came down to breakfast.

"Mother, where have I heard the name *Laverack* before?" he demanded.

Mrs. Lomax was pouring him his second cup of tea at the moment, and a sudden nervous movement of her hand flooded saucer and tray alike.

"There, Griff, you always were so abrupt! You know how I hate spilling things," cried the old lady, with an uneasy laugh.

Griff, seeing her trouble, came very near to gripping his fugitive memory fair and square.

"Never mind the tea; who *is* Captain Laverack?"

"I had rather you left that question alone, dear," she said slowly; "but if you must have an answer, you must. Long before you were born, there was a certain lying rumour set abroad; it was said that Joe Strangeways' mother had—had suffered at your father's hands; every one believed it at the time."

"I know now. And it was this same Captain Laverack who had really done the harm?"

"Yes, he got into difficulties soon after, you may remember, and went away to America. Your father wrote to him just before he sailed, asking him to put matters straight so far as he could; and Captain Laverack wrote back that he had enough discovered sins to face, without gratuitously adding to the list. This was the last we heard of him."

"Well, he has returned, it seems, with a mint of money.

Gabriel told me yesterday that he had come to live at Frender's Folly."

Mrs. Lomax frowned; her memory seemed to be busy with things of long ago.

"I remember your father taking him to see Frender's Folly one day," she said at last. "He was curiously attracted by the place, and bored me for a whole hour that evening by describing how he meant to buy it as soon as he could, and the alterations he intended to make. I am sorry he has come, Griff; it will open up the old sores."

CHAPTER VIII.

KATE STRANGEWAYS ASSERTS HERSELF.

GRIFF, during the next few months, was greatly exercised in mind touching his friend the preacher. Gabriel Hirst's moods were swinging to wider extremes nowadays; the constant sight of Greta kept the inner fires going, and whether they flamed or smouldered was a question largely of the way she treated him. Not altogether, though: there were times when he wrenched himself free of his fetters, and set his thoughts on the Word instead of on Greta, and made his congregations quake with his whirlwind eloquence. But he was what old Jose Binns termed "wobbly-like"; his temper was uncertain, his attitude towards his fellows harsh beyond all his old-time limits of justice. If for an hour or so he could persuade himself into the belief that Greta cared for him, then he spent the rest of the day in self-denunciation, because his heart was fixed on carnal welfare: if the girl ran across his path and chanced to mock him, as she frequently did, he forgot that she was not the highest goal man could have, and railed at the destiny which showed him a heaven with shut gates. On and off, he sickened with hate of Lomax, thinking him an unacknowledged rival; and after the stormy scenes, which generally followed hot-foot on the heels of such humours, came abasement of himself before Lomax—an abasement that hurt Griff far more than the passion which preceded it.

Gabriel Hirst suffered, during these months, as he had not known how to suffer before that meeting with Greta Rotherson on the sunny Sabbath morning. He grew more sensitive than ever to changes in the face of the moor and sky. When the day

was bright and the wind blew soft, there seemed excuse for his gaining passion—even a hope sometimes; but when the storm-skies opened, and the wind came ravening out of the north, and the moor streams swelled themselves to rivers, Gabriel Hirst would awake to the sins of the world and his own wrongdoing —would hark back to his scanty fare, and his wrestlings with the Adversary. But the Adversary, with that practical, vivid imaginativeness of his, showed nowadays in the guise of a woman.

Greta, for her part, was growing out of all patience with the preacher. He could not speak to her but the words tripped each other up as they came from his mouth; he was awkward with his hands and feet directly he found himself near her; he looked a hundred proposals out of his eyes, but never approached the utterance of one. She cared for him—if he would only let her —and she was angry with him, ashamed of, sorry for, him; so that amongst it all the girl, like Gabriel himself, was like to spoil her temper for good. What angered her most was that Gabriel was always like this in *her* company; she had seen him riding with Griff, and had noticed how manly, and neat, and broad-shouldered he looked. Why would he never come to her in decent clothes, or square his shoulders when he stood before her? And why, in the name of goodness, did she care *how* he came to her?

It was a matter of surprise to the villagers that their preacher should be so given to "fits and starts." One Sunday he would rain brimstone from the pulpit, while the next would find him tender almost to the verge of tears.

"Nay, nay, I doubt it's too mich for Gabriel; he should tak hisseln off ivery other week an' rest a bit," commented a member of his following.

"That's so, lad, that's so," assented Jose Binns; "he's nobbut poorly like, is th' pracher, or he'd niver gie us such pap sermons as that'n we hed yester morn. Oh, ay, he'd better tak a rest, an' that's plain to ony man 'at can see to th' end on his nose."

But Greta's comments on the preacher were of a different

sort. "He's such *a woman*, father," she said to Miller Rotherson one day. It was her usual remark when Gabriel had particularly angered her.

"Don't be too sure, lass. I've no call to fight his battles, seeing how often he's bothered and bothered me about my soul—but this I'll say for Gabriel Hirst: he's no woman at the heart of him. Greta, I'd think shame if I was you to set so much store by the outside."

"I don't like an apple with an ugly rind, however good it be inside," said Greta, crossly.

"And there you make your mistake, as women-folk mostly do. Give me the ugliest-looking apple you can find, and I'll know it's worth eating."

"But Gabriel isn't ugly," flashed the girl, perversely.

The miller laid down his pipe, and looked quizzically at his daughter.

"Has he snared thy heart, lass, this preacher fellow?"

Greta tossed her head, got half-way through a denial, and ended with a storm of sobs.

"There, there, Greta, don't cry," murmured Miller Rotherson, as she came to his knee and buried her head out of sight. "Supposing he *is* too blind, this Gabriel Hirst, to know a good thing when he sees it—there are other men in the world."

She lifted up her head at that and pushed back the hair from her eyes.

"But not one that can come near him, father."

"Well, well; I never did understand the twists and the turns of you women, and I never shall, as I told your poor mother most every day of her life. He's such a woman, sings the lass one minute, and the next——"

"So he is," quoth Greta, and ran from the room to tidy herself.

And all this, as has been said, bothered Griff Lomax no little. He felt like a father to these two young people, and had set his heart on their making a match of it. He was in and out of the mill a good deal; old Rotherson took kindly

to him, and Greta grew to regard him in the light of a hail-fellow-well-met sort of comrade, who showed no disposition to make love, and who was yet willing to serve as a friendly basis of jealousy when the occasion demanded it.

And all the while Griff never once guessed that he was himself walking—nay, running—into deep waters. The mother and he went very often across the three miles of moor that lay between Marshcotes and Peewit House. Almost as often Kate Strangeways walked to the Manor; sometimes she sat by the parlour fireside, with her hands in her lap, enjoying the sensation of being thoroughly idle; sometimes she played the model in the snug little studio upstairs, and watched Griff as he plied his brushes. True, he had asked permission simply to paint her portrait; but he wanted more than that—and, wanting it, contrived in his usual headstrong way to obtain it. There was no trace of self-deception in his enthusiasm for Kate's strong, lithe type of beauty. It was with an artist's zeal that he seized this and that new pose, or altered expression; and if he was gentler with her after the fatigue of posing, more solicitous that she should not tire herself unduly, than was altogether necessary—well, how could he help it, when he had, in very fact, been searching after this treasure-trove of his ever since he took to painting?

Mrs. Lomax buzzed in and out of the studio while they were at work, and was disposed to blame Griff for what she called his callousness in the matter of his model's welfare; at times she even went so far as to be indignant that the boy could be so blinded by his art as to lose sight of the good red gold that lay beneath the surface of Kate's quiet manners. But she never stopped to picture what must happen should Griff once dig down to the gold and set his heart on wealth that belonged to his neighbour.

Only Roddick guessed which way the wind was blowing, and he kept his opinions to himself. Griff would ride over to Wynyates two or three times a week, and he rarely left without a word or two about the woman who lived across the moor.

"Across the moor she lives, do you say?" Roddick had asked, with a start, the first time Griff had mentioned her.

"Yes; what of that? You look as if there were some one hereabouts in whom you are interested. Is that the reason——"

"Pish, romantic boy! I'm interested in grouse, trout, and rabbits; don't saddle me with your women." But he recurred to the topic for all that, as Griff was mounting Lassie at the gate. "Does she live on the Marshcotes moor?" he asked suddenly.

"No, the Cranshaw side," said Lomax, with deliberate intent to take Roddick unawares.

"By God!" muttered Roddick, under his breath.

Griff saw the contraction of his brows and laughed.

"So that is the trend of your secret, is it? Put your mind at rest, old fellow; she lives on the Marshcotes moor right enough, and she is the wife of a master-quarryman."

"You're a fool," said Roddick, gruffly, and shut the door with a bang.—"Why the devil won't Lomax let my secret alone?" he muttered, stirring up the fire in his parlour. "Jove, though, I fancied for the moment that Frender's Folly was his destination; Janet might care for a man of Lomax's build—the Lord knows why she picked *me* out from the crowd—and that's just the rub of it all. Oh, my God, if only I were free!"

After that evening Roddick learnt a good deal about Kate Strangeways—or, at any rate, about Griff's conception of her. He was an astute man where other people's follies were concerned, and he could have told Lomax that the adventure was bound to end in one of two ways.

"He wouldn't believe me, so where is the use of telling him?" Roddick argued. "For a clever man, old Lomax is pretty blind—yes, a confounded ass whenever a woman is toward. This is biting deeper than he'll like, though, when he comes to open his eyes; it's not the trashy stuff he called love while the Ogilvie woman had him in tow. Well, I'll wait; there'll be a cheerful blow-up one of these days."

But neither Griff nor the old lady of the Manor thought of coming evil. They walked far and wide by day, and at night they chatted of old times, of new endeavours, by the parlour fire. The itch for work, too, was taking a surer hold of Griff, and he was well satisfied with the progress of his picture. Autumn had long ago failed to winter, and the moors were looking their best; the heather had lost its gaudy raiment of purple, and stretched away in patches of rusty brown, of sober red, that fitted better with its savage dignity. Overhead, on the fine days, were wonderful shifting tints of sapphire and clear-cut green, with sunsets that stretched, purple and crimson, along half the horizon edge; then, again, the wind would shift to rain, and the sullen banks of yellow would come crowding across the sky from over Ling Crag, and the tremor and stress of storm would sweep into the man's heart. And all the while the woman across the moor grew dearer to him; she was part and parcel of the heath he loved, the sunsets that fired him to endeavour, the wind that made him drunker than wine could ever do. If he failed to look at the situation squarely, it was because Kate was always there, to be seen whenever the wish moved him; had a rival stepped in, or had she left Marshcotes for a space, Griff would better have understood it all.

Kate Strangeways, too, began to find heart again, began to feel the old use of her limbs and the old relish for a gale; she wondered, now and then, what had wrought this change in her, but it was long ere she was brought to confess that she counted the days between visit and visit of a man who had troubled himself to bring fresh interest into her dull round of care. Her manner towards her husband changed; she found courage to fight him, and she conquered; she furbished up a little bedroom facing south, and maintained her rights of property therein, and did not stop to inquire what instinct prompted her to privacy.

As for Joe, he got drunk oftener nowadays; his will held altogether too much parley with the shadowy places, and, as a consequence, he blustered more and was less capable than ever of backing up his bluster. Just once he tried to trespass

on Kate's private domain; it was a night of late November, and he had sat up chatting with Hannah, the maid-of-all-work, after his wife had gone to bed. Hannah was even a little sourer than her wont, and she gave Strangeways a lengthy account of young Lomax's comings and goings.

"I'd be shamed, if I war a man, to put up wi' my wife's hoity-toity ways, same as tha does," she snarled, with a freedom born of the sense that she was talking to one of her own class. "She mun sleep i' her own bedroom, mun she? Happen there's more i' that nor there seems, if tha'd getten a couple of een i' thy heäd."

"What dost 'a meän? Come, out wi' it; I cannot abide thy ins an' thy outs, an' thy shammocky ways o' talk. There's no mouse-holes about me, an' I look to find other fowk talking fair an' square. What dost 'a meän, woman?"

"Nay, if tha cannot guess, it's noan for a honest woman to tell thee. Didn't I say 'at young Lummax comes an' goes for all th' world as if he war th' maister? If that isn't enow, I'd like to know what is?"

Joe brought the bowl of his pipe down hard on the grate and smashed it.

"She shall shift her quarters to-neet, or I'll shift mine," he muttered.

"Fine talking," sneered Hannah.

"Hod thy whisht, wench! I tell thee I'll teach the wife to come it ower me; ay, that I will," said Joe, doggedly. He kicked off his boots and went shambling up the stairs; tried the handle of Kate's door, and found it locked; swore at her and commanded her to open. She did open at last, and stood on the threshold. She had taken off the bodice of her dress, and her bust and beautiful bare arms showed faintly by light of the candle behind her. Joe, despite his sodden state, felt something of the old desire as his eyes took in the contour of her figure.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"It's lonely wark, Kate, living wi' a wife that's no wife, an' I willun't stand it."

"When you had me, Joe," said she bitterly, "you were never so free with kindness. A woman gets tired of being kicked out of bed, and I'm not going to risk it again."

"When fowks is wed, they're wed. Me an' thee's teed fast as parson could tee us, an' I've a right to thee—ay, that I hev —a right o' law, an' a right o' parson."

A swift smile came to Kate's lips, as she straightened herself and sought his eye in the semi-darkness.

"Then, Joe Strangeways, you can go for the parson and bring him to help you; for you'll never touch me again, if I have to fight the lot of you."

"I'm a honest man," Joe declared, after a disconcerted pause.

"It's a queer country that would call you honest, Joe." The wife was feeling almost flippant for the moment, as the stronger sort of women do in moments of strain.

A long silence followed, broken only by the shuffling of Joe's feet, and the ticking of the clock in the kitchen down below, and the rattle of mice behind the wainscoting.

"I'm a honest man," reiterated Joe at last; "an' dang me if I'll see my wife go wrang wi' th' first fine gent what taks a fancy to her."

"Go wrong!" she cried, with a sudden blaze of fury. "You dare to come to me and——"

Joe felt vaguely that he was getting the advantage now that he had made her angry.

"Ay, go wrang; that's what it's leading to," he responded doggedly.

All the fight went out of Kate. He had brought home to her at last what she had hidden from herself all these months: she was face to face with the truth, and she saw in a flash the dreary stretch of years that spread before her—after she had proved true to her conscience—after she had said good-bye to Griff, and they had each gone their ways. Without a word she turned; before Joe had divined her purpose, she had locked the door in his face and left him on the cold landing to marvel at the queer ways of women. She threw herself on

the bed and cried her heart out, while her husband growled his way to his own room. She wanted never, never to see Griff again.

But Griff himself chanced to ride over the very next morning, and he altered her outlook on things. The clear, friendly look in his eyes—the easy talk on this or that topic of interest which they shared in common—his kindly insistence that she was far from well, and that he meant to tell his mother when he got home how little care she took of herself—all helped her to view the last night's misery in a quieter light. With a quick feminine subterfuge she told herself that his regard for her did not go very deep; if her own went deeper, need she make herself foolish in his eyes by bidding him never come near her again?

After he had gone—with a faint wonder in his mind at her changed manner—Kate went over all that she had suffered at her husband's hands; and across her honesty of purpose struck a swift desire to take life while she had it and enjoy it to the full. She put the desire away from her; but it returned day by day, and she grew less eager to cast it out. Gradually she let the old life go its way; Griff came and went, and she was glad to see him; she would not look behind.

But Roddick, in amongst his own perplexities, found time now and then for a sardonic grin, and a wonder as to how soon the climax would be reached.

And the climax came sooner than he expected.

CHAPTER IX.

CONFESSION.

KATE STRANGEWAYS, after her sudden collapse before Joe's accusation, nerved herself to the fight once more. Joe attempted to take up the same line on the next night, and was beaten; at heart he was afraid of her, because he knew her to be stronger, finer in breed, than himself. Then, gradually, he grew mortally sick of her, now that she showed so uncompromising a determination to stand on her own level. He conceived an idea, and soaked the idea in much strong ale until it mellowed.

"When a gentleman born," said he to his mug, "when a gentleman born taks th' trouble to come aboon three miles i' search on a wench, he allus hes one notion. Well, I'll let 'em bide, that I will, an' I won't break th' bones i' his body, 'cos he's ower big for that kind o' marlaking. They shall just go their own foul gate, an' we'll see what'll come o' my fine lady's airs an' graces when this Lummax hes dragged her in th' mire. She puts up her high-bred nose, does she, when I get a bit on th' booze now and again? Well, it'll be six o' one an' half a dozen o' t' other sooin."

So Kate, thanks to a resolve of which she guessed nothing, had a whole month's respite from her husband. He went out every night directly after tea, and rarely spoke to her during the few moments when they were together. She took the respite gladly, and flattered herself that the trouble with Griff was assuming no more alarming proportions as the days went on. Yet she wondered, and ached, and cried at rare intervals, just because he could maintain his friendly attitude so easily; freely would she have forgiven him if he had faltered once or twice in well-doing.

"Shall we go to Peewit to-morrow? I promised to take Kate some books," said Mrs. Lomax to Griff, one evening, as they sat in their favourite nook by the parlour fire.

"You oughtn't to, with that cold of yours. Why will you never look after yourself, mother?"

"Don't coddle me, Griff. My cold must be driven out by some good frosty air; the walk will do me good."

But she was worse on the next morning, and Griff put his foot down in a way that even his mother understood. He sat with her until three o'clock, and then she insisted on his going for a run on the moors.

"I'll walk across to Peewit, if you like, and take the books with me," he said, turning at the door. "It will give me an object in going out."

"Very well, dear. You will find them in my room, on the table near the window."

He stowed away the books in sundry capacious pockets, and set off towards the moor at a swinging pace. It was near the end of March, but the frost, repenting the easy winter it had given the Marshcotes folk, had suddenly bestirred itself and gripped the moorside shrewdly. Just as Griff left the churchyard, he met Greta Rotherson on her way to the village.

"You're enjoying the frost, too?" he said, coming to rest against a gate.

"No, I'm not," retorted Greta, crossly; "it's far too cold, and the end of one's nose gets red."

"Not *your* nose, at any rate; your cheeks have used up the supply.—I saw Gabriel this morning for five minutes."

"Did you?" Disdainfully.

"Yes; he called at the mill last night, and came round to tell me how disappointed he was to find you out."

"To find father out? He would be: we were with friends in the village."

"Look here, Miss Rotherson—why do you treat poor old Hirst as you do?" queried Griff, bluntly.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Lomax. Why should I treat him differently?"

"Because—well, being a woman, you know more than I can tell you. It seems a pity, that's all; he worries about things."

Greta dropped her air of aloofness.

"Gabriel Hirst," she snapped, "will never get rid of his preaching. If he was making love to a woman, he'd quote Scripture in the middle of it—and a woman doesn't want that."

"Well, no, she doesn't. But women were made to put up with things. Can't you get at the man in Gabriel, and let the preacher go hang?"

"I can do the last thing certainly. Good day, Mr. Lomax: you seem very anxious to get your friend settled in life."

The sun was dying bloodily behind Peewit House as Griff climbed the last stretch of rising ground. The clouds showed stormy. A dun mist hugged the skirts of the moor.

"This is cheery after the cold look of things outside," he cried, as he stretched his legs before the fire.

"It was kind of you to bother about the books: you will have a stormy walk back, I'm afraid." The trouble of contact with him weighed heavily on Kate for the first moment; she could scarcely find words in which to answer him.

"Ah, but that doesn't matter when you can see in the dark, as we moor folk can." He was curiously insistent on that moor bond between them. "Will you let me smoke just one pipe, and then I must be off; mother is down with a cold, and I promised not to be away for long."

He lit his pipe, and Kate Strangeways went out in a little while, to return with tea and buttered toast; they fell into some out-of-the-way topics over the tea, and continued them until another pipe, and yet another, had been smoked. Griff had forgotten all about the time, and his companion, while she remembered it, remembered also that Sunday was a day which her husband invariably spent at the Marshcotes inn, and that he would not be back much before midnight at the earliest; she had felt lonely before Griff came, and she wanted him to stay as long as forgetfulness of the hour would let him.

But he rose at last and looked at his watch.

"I really must be off; do you know what time it is, Mrs. Strangeways? The mother will think I have strayed into a bog, or something, if I keep her waiting much longer. Good night. No, don't come to the door; it is too cold for you."

"Too cold for you." There was a tenderness in the thought that soothed the woman; there was an off-hand friendliness in the tone that hurt her in some unexplained way.

He opened the heavy oak door, with its armour of nails and bolts and its out-of-date lock. A solid wall of fog came up close to the steps in front; snow showed white on the threshold, and drifting fog and snow combined took traveller's leave of the ingress afforded by the open door.

"You can't cross the moor until the fog lifts," said Kate, at his elbow.

"But I must. Mother will be sick with fear when she sees how bad the night is."

Instinctively she laid a hand on his arm.

"Better that than death," she said quietly.

"I can find my way in a fog; it is only a little extra darkness, and I know every inch of the way."

"Nonsense!" she said sharply. "No one can be sure of the road in a fog, and there is snow as well. I tell you, it is madness to venture out."

Griff Lomax could not but admit as much, as he obeyed the pressure of the hand on his arm.

"It will clear presently," he said, shutting the door, and following the woman into the parlour.

"There's more nor one kind o' storm brewing, I fancy," muttered Hannah, peering through a nick in the kitchen door.

The evening wore on. From time to time Lomax went to see if there were any change in the weather, but the fog showed no sign of lifting, and the snow crept earthward in bigger flakes than ever.

"You must spend the night here," said Kate. Her voice was peremptory, but a hot blush came to her cheeks.

"I ought to make an attempt to reach Marshcotes,"

muttered the other, doubtfully. Reason told him how foolhardy such an undertaking would be.

"With the snow covering every track? How can you, even if the fog clears?"

He gave in at last, as he was bound to do; but, once the point was settled, there was ample room for other disturbing thoughts. Hannah put her head in at the door presently.

"Shall you be wanting owt more to-neet?" she demanded.

"No; you can go to bed. Good night, Hannah."

"Good neet, mum."

Hannah's tread on the upstairs journey was heavy; her downward steps, some few minutes later, were correspondingly light.

There was a silence between the two who were seated on either side of the great peat fire in the parlour. Lomax pulled at his pipe and stared into the glowing peat-ash; the woman watched his face. He grew conscious of her gaze, and turned his eyes suddenly to hers.

The months had been slow to teach him, but he learned their lesson now. As the seasons had run their course, the man's great love had been growing—growing so silently, so little at a time, that he had not once pulled himself up to say, "This is love that has you by the throat; thrust it off while you can." And now—now, all in the space of that quick uplifting of his eyes to hers, he had come to understand. Nothing he had felt, read of, dreamed about, was like this masterful reality; it hurried him along blindfold, as the welter and swing of a gale from the north had now and then driven him clean off the moor-track—into the bogland, it might be.

He leaped from his chair, and crossed over to her, and put his arms about her. She spoke no word, and he was silent; but her lips went out to his.

The reaction followed. He set her free, and strode restlessly up and down the room, with its black oak panels, its ridiculous china dogs on the mantelshelf, its fiery eye of smouldering ash. She followed his steps with her eyes, and cared not one whit save that he loved her.

"See, Kate," he said, coming close to her again, "you are the wife I should have had, but you are not free to hear me tell you so. We must go apart, you and I, lest—my darling, my darling, how I want you!"

Conscience, stilled for awhile, raised its voice. The woman warded off that second caress with which the man was minded to point his logic.

"Let me alone, Griff! Let me go. You know it is not right."

He stood irresolute. The worst and the best in him fell to blows, and fought the quarrel out to the bitter end. Then he put his lips to her hand, and raised her very gently.

"Show me to my room, Kate. It is time you were asleep; you look tired," he said, as nearly in the tones of the friend of yesterday as he could contrive.

She lit two candles, gave him one, and preceded him up the creaking wooden stairs. She let her hand rest in his for a space at the door of his room, then left him.

At eleven of the same morning, the godly folk of Marshcotes, clothed in their Sunday best, were singing lustily within the bleak walls of the Primitive Methodist Chapel; other godly villagers were singing with slightly less vigour in the Parish Church across the way. Joe Strangeways' mind, however, was set on other things, as he shambled across the ill-paved square that fronts the churchyard. He glanced at the church clock, and leered at large upon the village.

"Eleven of a Sunday morn, an' me noan drunk yet," he observed. "Dang me, but that beäts all."

By way of repairing this slight omission, Strangeways entered the Bull. The fog was thick in his brain, and thick on the landscape, when he emerged. A friend in need guided him to the verge of the moor, but it was clear that there was to be no getting home that night; so the friend guided him back to the Bull, and it was seven of the next morning when he set off for Peewit, to change into his working clothes before going to the quarries.

Hannah clattered to meet him as he entered.

"I telled thee how it 'ud be," she said, with a toss of the

head. "Griff Lummax war up yester afternooin an' stayed his tea."

"Stayed his tea, did he? Can't he get decent pickings at home?" muttered Joe, whose head and temper were alike impaired by his carouse.

"An' after that he stayed th' neet. They reckoned it war too wild for him to cross th' moor. Too wild! I'd hev crossed myseln, it war that bright."

"Nay, lass, tha'rt wrang there. It war thick, main thick, or I'd hev been home long sin'."

"Drink maks a man see thick," observed Hannah, dispassionately. And Joe took to himself a shamefaced look.

"Did tha see owt?" he asked presently.

"See? Ay, a bonny sight too mich. I saw 'em kissing by th' parlour fire. An' at after that—well, th' missus knaws best what happened at after. See yonder, he's coming dahn th' stair now, fair as if he owned th' place."

Joe's face grew black with rage. He never doubted Hannah's story, to its uttermost detail. This, then, was what he had worked and hoped for—the wife who had scorned him was on his own level at last. Yet he was not pleased, when it came home to him how well his plan had succeeded; his jealousy was roused; he felt the need of Kate more than he had yet done in his six years of courtship and marriage. He stood with his hands behind him and watched Griff come down step by step.

"Tha'rt i' th' wrang house, seemingly," he growled.

"Through no fault of mine. Why didn't you return last night?" retorted Lomax, quickly. He had not given thought enough to Kate's danger; but he realized now that he must carry the thing through with a high hand, if the ugly brute at the stair-foot were to be silenced.

"'Cos I war drunk," retorted Joe, succinctly.

"Well, if you had been sober enough to take a square look at the weather, you'd have seen the snow and fog. I preferred a roof over my head last night, and your wife offered me one. I'm obliged to you both, Strangeways."

"Oh, th' wife offered it, did she? Then th' wife shall pay for it," muttered Joe.

Griff went up to Strangeways, and took him roughly by the coat-collar.

"And you shall pay double if you lay a finger on her. You surly brute! To threaten your wife because she kept a man from starving on the moor. Strangeways, I've a mind to give you one thrashing on account—another to follow if you don't behave yourself."

He took a square look at Joe's eyes, saw that the man feared him beyond all promptings of rage, and swung out of the house. But he was sorely troubled about Kate as he went across the glittering frost-flakes to Marshcotes Manor.

CHAPTER X.

THE WOMAN OF SORROWSTONES SPRING.

Between Marshcotes and Cranshaw the highroad runs for a mile and a half. From Cranshaw to Ludworth in Lancashire is a very good six. The hill rises sharp after you pass Cranshaw Church and the wild, wind-swept burial ground; and well towards the top, soon as you gain the open moor, a grim line of "stoups" guards the right hand of the way. It is an eerie road to travel, especially if night has fallen and brought you no company. The stoups, huge blocks of millstone-grit, white-washed at the base, blackened at the top, seem to stand out from the darkness, to move towards you almost. Year after year they have stood there, pointing the way to travellers: if snow be thick on the highway, their black crowns show clear against the white; if the moor lie black, their white bodies point the way of safety. Year after year, with frost and rain and snow, the rough moor weather has made sport of the stoups; they are workers of charity, and buffets are their fit reward. It is vain to call them senseless stone, and pass them by, and think no more of it; they stop you, willy-nilly, with their rough-hewn, tragic faces; they have lived in the silent places, and the mystery of a long loneliness is theirs. A true man done to death by the cold was the cause of their being, and many a true man killed by harsher foes has gone to swell the tale since then. More than once, or twice, or thrice, has murder walked beside those silent, ghostly stoups, and the bogs to right of them could tell some fearsome stories if they chose.

It was then some five and twenty years since Joshua Lomax, Griff's father, tried to cross from Ludworth one bitter winter's

night; they found him a mile from the highroad, dead from exposure, and his widow, as soon as she could bring herself to read other people's welfare through the crystal of her own trouble, made haste to build the sentinel line of stoups, lest more good lives should be sacrificed. Griff could not bear to walk that road for many a long day after the tragedy, and even now he shuddered as he gained the outposts.

Tinker's Pool glooms down in the hollow, just beyond the last of the stoups, and the gamekeeper's house stands at the top of the road; between the two lies Sorrowstones Spring—a two-roomed, crumbling cottage that gets its name from the well-spring at the door. Rachel Strangeways, the quarrymaster's grandmother, had lived here time out of mind, and she would have found it hard to chance on a dwelling more to her liking. Rachel was reputed a witch throughout the countryside; maidens came to her, in fear and trembling, to have their fortunes told, and burly farmers sought her aid whenever the Evil Eye was working havoc among their cattle. She dealt in drugs, too, and great virtue was attached to an infusion she prepared of a certain bitter herb which only grew on the marsh that hugged her door. Her eighty-five years had bowed her body to the proportions of a hunchback's, and there was an evil light in her blue-green eyes that did not fit ill with her reputation. Whenever Joe found himself in straits he repaired to the maternal roof-tree, for Mistress Strangeways could show good common sense on occasion.

Joe walked over to the cottage on the night following Griff's stay at Peewit House. He entered the living-room without knocking, and found Mistress Strangeways huddled over the embers of a poverty-stricken fire.

"Well, mother," said he, "I'm i' a queer way."

Rachel gibbered over her ashes awhile, then looked up. Her blue-green eyes grew almost soft as they rested on this scrubby-bearded clown, who was yet bone of her bone. For there had been a time when the old witch's hand was not against the world, nor the world's hand against her; that was in the days when she and her man had a spruce little cottage

at the edge of the moor, and a strip of garden where the peonies and the sweet marjoram and the ladslove grew, and one little lass to fend for. The little lass had grown up into a slim, well-favoured maid, and the mother had loved her after the profligate fashion of these rough-speeched, tender-hearted women of the uplands. And Mother Strangeways' heart was broken, once for all, when the girl died in bringing Joe to a shameful birth; she did not rail against her daughter, but against the world that had wronged her, as the way of her class is; and she hardened herself against all men living, and buried her husband in due course, and came to this battered, wind-swept cottage to live out her days. And Joe Strangeways, who had inherited neither his mother's fearlessness nor his father's breeding, was all she had left in the world to cherish and frame plans for.

"So tha'rt come to me?" she muttered, still with her eyes on Joe's face. "So tha'rt come to me? Ay, it brings men to their women-folk, does trouble; year in an' year out, I niver see thy black face, Joe, without there's trouble agate. Sit thee dahn, lad; sit thee dahn, and let's know what's toward."

"Just this—my wife's gone wrang wi' a gentleman. I could ha' borne it better if he'd hed rough talk an' a rough pair o' hands."

Rachel stiffened her dwarfed old body.

"An' who may it be, Joe?"

"Griff Lummax, out to Marshcotes Manor. I knew how it 'ud be when th' mother—th' girt, ugly man of a figure—got coming it ower Kate."

The blue-green eyes shot fire.

"Then why didn't tha get him by t' throat, and squeeze th' life out on his body?"

"'Cos he's ower strong," growled Joe.

"Ower strong, ower strong!" flashed the crone. "I didn't talk i' that way when I hed th' use of my body an' wits. Tha'rt noan o' my flesh, Joe—no, nor bone o' my bone, nawther—shame on thee, lad, for a shammocky nowt of a man." She pushed her skinny face close up to his. "Dost mind what

Joshua Lummax, Griff's father, did to thy mother five an' thirty year agone?" Her voice crackled and hissed like the fall of water on live coal. "Dost mind how he came wi' his fine airs, just same as th' son hes done to thy wife, an' witched th' heart out on her? Dost 'a know i' what fashion I sarved him?"

"Tha did nowt," muttered Joe, surlily; "tha gabbled an' gabbled for a fearful deal o' years, an' th' cold took him off i' th' end. Dunnot thee talk to me till tha's getten summat to show for t' to-do tha'rt making."

Still closer the lean face pressed to his. She whispered something in his ear, and he glared at her with an admiration touched by fear.

"Art 'a leeing, mother?" he demanded.

"Leeing? No, by God! I hed my rights i' th' end, an' th' lass sleeps quiet i' her grave. Thee see to thy own porridge, Joe. I'm ower owd to cook for other fowk."

"Tha'rt a sight fuller i' th' wit nor me, owd or young. What mun I do, mother?"

"Do? Kill him, I tell thee, an' off wi' them Lummax peacocks for gooid an' all. That's th' porridge *tha* hes to cook."

"She came it high an' mighty ower me, did Mrs. Lummax; reckoned she'd gie me a bit o' stick, she did. More nor once her son hes hed th' laugh on me, i' sight o' all th' Marshcotes fowk. I owe him a two or three hard knocks—ay, that I do."

"Then gie 'em, tha lout! Childless am I this day—not counting a six ha'porth o' copper like thee—an' childless tha'll mak th' Lummax woman. Ower strong, is he? Lig i' a hedge-bottom, then, an' crack his skull wi' a pickaxe."

Joe kicked at the smouldering peat, but his face showed no responsive enthusiasm.

"Tha itches to see me dangling at th' end on a hangman's rope, that's easy to be seen. Dost 'a think a plain man can kill gentlefowk same as he'd lake at a bit o' pigeon-shooiting, an' niver hear no more on't?"

"Hes Mother Strangeways swung for Joshua Lummax? Nay, tha shames me, Joe, tha shames me. I mun ha' kept thee ower long at th' bottle; tha'rt a mammy's lad, a right

mammy's lad." She rose from her bench, and her hands moved swiftly, the claw fingers keeping time to her thoughts. "Christ! if I war only young again!" she shrieked. "If I could han'le a knife—or an iron bar, mebbe—I'd hev my rights o' yon Lummaxes." She fell once again to a sitting posture, making hideous mouths at the fire. Then a fresh train of ideas was started, and she looked up at Joe with a cunning leer. "Blood's blood," she crackled, "but swinging's swinging; an' happen tha can hurt him war nor even killing 'ud do. They're fearful proud, them Lummaxes; break 'em, lad, break 'em wi' law; set their names on th' housetops, an' mak 'em a bye-word i' th' land. Ay, hev th' law on 'em, an' bide thy own time for th' rest."

"Th' law?" snarled Joe. "Th' law is a matter o' brass, an' nowt but brass. Him 'at's getten th' fattest purse can allus best a poor man. Nay, doan't thee talk to me about law."

"Wilt 'a hearken to sense, or willun't 'a? Thee go to-morn, i' th' dinner-hour, to Lawyer French i' Marshcotes. He's a sharp un, yon, an' he kep' me my bit o' freehold when Squire war minded to set me, bag an' baggage, on th' roadside. Ay, Lawyer French bested th' Squire an' proper."

"An' charged thee a pretty penny, I'll be bound."

"Not more nor a poorish woman could pay; an' he'll noan charge thee more nor tha can pay."

"Well, I mak nowt o' sich things. What sort of a figure should I cut i' th' witness-box, afore judge, jury an' all, swearing away my pride i' my own wedded wife?"

"Oh, ay, tha's showed thyseln mighty proud on her, hesn't 'a, Joe?" snapped the mother. "It'll break thy heart, willun't it, to lose thy lass? What tale didst 'a come to me wi' a four months back? That she wouldn't do this, an' she wouldn't do that, an' tha wert main weary o' th' sight on her."

"But I'm noan for making her free to marry this Lummax lad."

"*Marry*, sayst 'a? He'll noan marry her, if I know th' gentry. Tha'll hev one less mouth to feed, an' Kate 'ull hev to set to an' fend for herseln."

"Begow," muttered her son, after a lengthy silence, "tha allus did gie a chap a bit o' gooid, straightforrard sense. I'll off to this lawyer chap to-morn, dang me if I don't!"

Rachel crouched over her fire after he had left her.

"To hev a babby like yon for a grandson," she grumbled. "Cannot move hand nor foot by hisseln. Eh, eh, to hev the free swing o' my own arms again, an' young Lummax at t' other end on a mattock! But I'm owd, owd; nawther spells, nor muscles, wark as they once did. Almighty God, if tha'd only mak me strong for a day—just for a day!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE GHOST OF WYNYATES.

VAGUE rumours began to come to Griff's ears nowadays, and people stared curiously at him as he passed them in the street.

"Look here, Gabriel, what's in the wind?" he asked bluntly, while the preacher and he were taking a walk together one afternoon.

Although the summer was well advanced now, Joe Strangeways, despite his ready acquiescence in the old witch's advice, had but lately summoned resolution enough to take him to Lawyer French's office. But his tongue had not been idle in the meanwhile.

Gabriel was not the man to break any news gently, nor to beat about the bush; he lacked the guile. So he rested a steady eye on Griff, and—"They say that matters are wrong between you and Kate Strangeways," he said.

Lomax met the preacher's eye squarely.

"Do you believe their tales?"

"I want not to. Lad, it would break my heart to believe it of you. Can you give me your word it's false?"

"As false as the liar who set it abroad. You can believe it or not as you like; but we're free of that charge."

Griff was hurt that the story was going abroad—hurt by a remembrance of his part in the scene which was responsible for it, hurt by the preacher's momentary doubt.

"Forgive me, Griff; I might have known," said Gabriel Hirst, and accepted his friend's word for good and all.

A night or two later, as Lomax was coming home from the

moor, he saw Joe Strangeways go in at the Bull doorway; the oil-lamp at the corner showed an evil look on the quarry-master's face. Without pause or hesitation, Griff followed him into the noisy public bar. There was a shuffling of feet, followed by a silence.

"Strangeways, a word with you," said Griff, standing in the middle of the floor.

Joe laughed, and never so much as glanced at his enemy.

"Stand up, and come over here."

Still the quarrymaster did not look up, and Lomax crossed the floor.

"You're a heavy weight to lift, and I'd rather you came without fetching; but——"

Joe abandoned his defiant attitude on a sudden; he remembered that evening when Griff had laid him prone, with his feet on the top, and his head on the bottom, step of the Bull doorway. He got up reluctantly, growling as he went. Griff set him with his face to the company.

"You have heard strange tales of me lately, neighbours?"

A subdued hum was the only answer.

"They came from Joe Strangeways here, if I'm not mistaken. Speak up, Joe! What have you got to say by way of proof?"

"Hannah see'd wi' her own een——" began Joe, then stopped. Lomax was so confoundedly cool about it all.

"Can you swear to that? Or am I right in guessing that Hannah lied to you, and taught you the lie pat off?"

This new suggestion staggered Joe's muddled wits; his knees shook under him, and he could make no answer. Griff waited for a space, nodding meanwhile at the landlord, who had come to the door to hear what was going on.

"Then I think I needn't keep you any longer, friends," he laughed at length. "Landlord, drinks round; it's thirsty work watching a liar try to moisten his tongue."

He turned to leave; and Joe was never the one to neglect the chance afforded by an adversary's back. He seized a

pewter-pot and hurled it with all his strength across the room. Griff felt it whizz past his ear, turned sharp round, and made for Strangeways in a fit of mad fury. He already had his hands at his throat, when a sudden thought pulled him up—a brute the man might be, and a liar, but he was Kate's husband. Nay, he himself was, in a measure, the quarrymaster's debtor—he had filched a kiss that was rightly his; he had stolen his wife's love from him.

"You were born a liar, Joe Strangeways. I'll leave you to it," he said, and went out.

But a shout followed him through the door.

"I'll be even wi' ye yet, Griff Lummax!" yelled Joe, in impotent fury. "Tha'rt ower big to be talked sense to; but thy wench's body shall pay for what tha's said an' done to me. Ay, by God! we'll see which on us is th' maister up to Teewit House! Twice tha's called me a liar, an' I'll blacken her een for that—one for th' first time ye called me, an' one for th' second."

"Hod thy blethering din!" cried one of his mates, roughly. "Tha'rt nobbut a windbag, Joe, an' a foul-mouthed bag at that."

Again Lomax came back. A cold fear seized him, as he caught the drift of the drunkard's threats; he had forgotten that his hasty method of self-defence might place Kate in jeopardy. Again he stood in the middle of the room and looked at the company; but his throat was parched; he was sick with pity, wild with the thought that Kate's name would soon be on every tongue here—would be bandied across this reeking bar, among the shag-smoke, the dirty pots, the beer-droppings on the floor.

"Tha'rt noan so pleased wi' thyseln, seemingly, as tha war a while back," jeered Strangeways, seeing that Griff made no further forward movement, but just stood there like one dazed. "Thee wend home to thy mammy-bird, lad, an' let other fowks's wives alone for th' future."

Still Lomax did not move. The wondering faces to right and left of him showed so many blurred spots of white through the smoke clouds. Every second that he stood there made against

them—against Kate and himself—yet the words would not come. The quarrymaster grew bolder, and rose to an effort of wit.

"Landlord," said he, taking two greasy coppers from his pocket and laying them on the table, "we're fine an' free-handed i' Marshcotes Parish. 'Drinks round,' says Mr. Lummax; an', 'drinks for Mr. Lummax,' says Joe Strangeways—— Come, Griff," he went on, with brutal familiarity, "we'll sink th' woman i' beer; tak her for gooid an' all if tha wants, an' we'll be mates, thee an' me. Let fowk talk. *I* bear thee no malice, lad."

Griff found his tongue at last. The less sober of the company afterwards declared that "it war as if fork-leetning war playing round his face, an' his words came out like thunner."

"Strangeways, I never yet gave my word to a thing and then went back on it. And I promise you now that if you lay a finger on Kate, I'll smash every bone in your body."

"An' swing for 't?" sneered Joe.

"Ay, and swing for it, if need be," Griff answered, his voice falling to a quietness that appalled the quarrymaster.

The landlord followed him into the passage.

"I'm fair sick o' yon Strangeways, sir. He's a surly wastril, as is allus kicking up a row i' my public. Only, ye wouldn't be thinking o' persecuting him for shying that there mug at ye? It 'ud be brought in drunk and disorderly, sure as sure, an' that harms a respectable public."

"Prosecuted?" murmured Griff. "No, of course not."

The landlord turned with a sigh of relief. Truth to tell, Griff scarcely grasped what he had said. He was face to face with a situation which, until now, he had realized but dimly. That swift understanding of the thing called love had so lifted him out and beyond the little world about him, had given him such new forces, new hopes, that he had hardly paused to ask himself "What next?" To-night, though, the matter was practical, urgent. Instinctively he made for Wynyates, quickening his pace with every stride. Gabriel Hirst was coming out of his gate as he passed through Ling Crag.

"Is that you, Griff? I thought it looked like your stride, though it's almost too dark to see."

"Yes, it's I. I'm off for a tramp."

"Where to?" asked the preacher, trying to fall in with his step.

"The devil."

"Griff, Griff, what's this? To speak so to the man who's loved and looked up to you—ay, looked up to you, for all your wild ways. Lad, do you want to—to make an end of our friendship?"

Gabriel had grown very sensitive of late to changes in those he loved.

Griff put out a hand into the darkness and gripped his friend's.

"Don't be a fool, old fellow. It isn't that—only, I want to be alone; I've troubles to think out, and there seems to be no way to it yet."

"Can't you tell them to me, Griff? I might be able to help."

Griff hesitated a moment, then laughed to himself, as he put the thought from him. The preacher was such a baby in women-matters; how could he appeal to him?

"Thanks, Gabriel, but I couldn't explain—not just yet. I'll come to you when the way shows a bit clearer.—Roddick has lived, and he's tough. He ought to be good for something," he added, after he had said good-night to Gabriel, and quickened his stride again.

He reached Wynyates, opened the door without knocking, and stamped into the hall.

"Who's there?" came a voice from the room to his right.

Griff followed the voice. He found Roddick seated at the table, which was covered with a jumble of cold beef, bread, apple-pie, cheese, and beer.

"Oh, you, is it?" said Roddick, cutting himself another slice of beef. "Why the deuce can't you enter in a Christian way? Have some food."

"So I will. I'd clean forgotten supper."

"Forgotten supper, had you?" snapped his host, when he was fairly launched. "A healthy man never does that. What's amiss, Lomax?"

Griff looked at him thoughtfully across the table.

"Something serious. I don't come for advice unless I need it."

"And then you don't take it. You always were a cross-grained beggar. Well?"

"There's a woman in the case."

"Damn the women!" growled Roddick. "Have some more beef."

Griff said no more on the subject till they had turned their chairs to the fire; then he made a plain statement of fact.

"So it's come at last, has it?" said Roddick, gruffly.

Griff flushed.

"Hold hard, Roddick; you're going a bit too far," he muttered, in answer to the spirit rather than the matter of the other's words. "We are innocent, I tell you!"

"Matter of terms, my boy. You kissed her, you say? It amounts to much the same thing."

"It does nothing of the kind. Besides, what fault there was lies at my door; she is not to blame."

"I never insinuated that either of you were to blame. I only said that it amounted to the same thing."

A silence followed, broken at length by Griff.

"It's pretty hopeless, either way," he finished. "If I leave things as they are, she runs a constant danger of being murdered by that brute. If we cut the whole thing, and go away together, it will break mother's heart."

Roddick had been oddly moved during this recital. Twice he had been on the point of blurting out something that lay at the top of his mind; thrice his face had grown soft with pity. It would not have been Roddick if he had allowed these lapses to go without correction.

"Well, you've got to choose," he said bluntly. "We always have to choose when anything serious is at stake. Which is more to you, the lover or the mother?"

Griff frowned at him.

"Roddick," he said, with just the trace of a catch in his voice, "when I speak of my mother, I don't mean any conventional rot. All my life she has been a lover and a friend to me."

The older man softened, and jeered again to hide it.

"You sound like a tract, Lomax. Give the woman up, then, and stick to the feeding-bottle."

"You're a brute!" muttered Griff, savagely, and said no more.

For ten minutes they sat and stared into the fire. The trees without—starveling sentries that challenged the moor winds, but were fain to let them pass—whimpered sorrowfully. A spit or two of rain sounded against the windows.

"God! I ought to have been born up here; I feel like that," cried Roddick, at last, pointing to the window on his right.

Griff had his back to the window and his eyes on the fire. Had he glanced at Roddick, he would have seen the sweat standing out on his forehead; the whole look of the man was changed since that casual glance at the window. But Griff noted nothing; he sat there moodily until his host should find something useful to say.

Roddick recovered himself with an effort.

"Old fellow, if I seem a brute at times, I have very good reason. It is hard, Lomax, to have to go on day after day without telling one's troubles to a living soul.—Your case and mine run on all fours."

"Your case and mine?" repeated Griff. "What do you mean?"

The other checked himself.

"There are some things best left untold. Chuck another log on the fire, will you?"

Another silence followed. Griff could stand it no longer, and rose to leave.

"Man, you're clean daft," he said irritably. "What is the use of asking you what I am to do?"

Roddick gripped the arm of his chair.

"Do?" he cried, with sudden energy. "If you take warning from me, you'll choose the nearest road to happiness, and have done with it. Wait, and wait, and wait, till you're sick with effort and half dead with hunger; yes, wait if you like, and be hanged to you—but you'll regret it."

"I begin to understand," muttered Griff. "Roddick, why did you never hint at this before?"

"Hint? I've hinted at nothing; I can't, for the girl's sake. Look here, Lomax," he added, more sanely, "if your mother is really a friend to you, and as sensible as you think her, she'll give you her blessing. Cut and run—it isn't orthodox advice, but it's level-headed. Cut and run, you fool; and get a look at happiness before you or the woman dies."

Griff moved to the door. Clearly his host was not in a fit state either to give or to take advice, and his suggestions tallied altogether too closely with the promptings of inclination.

"Good night, old man," he muttered; "we'll talk it over when—when you're more yourself. No, don't bother to come to the door with me; I found my way in without help, and I can go out the same way."

He closed the door after him. Roddick moved swiftly to the window, and peered through. There was nothing to be seen. He rattled his hand against the glass with pitiful impotence.

"You—devil!" he said, slowly.

When Griff opened the front door, a storm of wind and rain struck him full in the face. He pushed his way out with a laugh; wind and rain were staunch old friends, and this sort of horse-play was to his liking. He had barely crossed the threshold, and was about to turn and pull to the door after him, when a thing leaped out of the darkness. Something hard and bony went round his neck; something flabby and wet pressed close to his lips. He put out his arms and grasped a bundle of rags.

"It's cold and dark," said a voice. "And what call have you, Leo, to keep your true love waiting?"

Griff thrust the loathsome thing away, not without effort—those lean arms round his neck gripped like a vice. A hollow laugh went up into the darkness, and from the mingled odours Griff singled out the reek of brandy.

"Oh, I'm drunk," went on the voice; "but you took me for better or worse, Leo; yes, you did, so help me God!—and here you keep me waiting in the cold and the wet—in the cold and the wet. But you'll kiss me just once, Leo? That'll make it all right. Take me in, I tell you, and give me warmth; give me food and drink—drink, yes, drink!"

"Roddick!" shouted Griff. He feared this evil creature as he had never yet feared man.

A shadow came before the hall lamp, and Roddick stood at his side.

"What is it?" he demanded testily.

"A vampire, or a mad witch, or something. Why the devil can't she come into the light and give us a fair chance?"

They heard the sound of heavy footsteps crunching the gravel; the gate opened and clashed again; there was nothing to be seen but darkness, nothing to be felt but the clean, fresh wind.

"You have guessed half my secret now, I fancy—the wrong half," said Roddick, with a harsh laugh. "Good night. I must go and find her."

CHAPTER XII.

RELEASE.

As Griff was dressing, on the morning after his discovery of Roddick's secret, there flashed into his brain just a single word.

"Divorce!" he cried. "Why did I never think of that before? Why didn't Roddick suggest it last night? If only Strangeways will do it, we shall have our chance of happiness."

So wonderful was the thought of freedom that he scarcely paused to look on the darker side of the question, to realize what it would mean to Kate to be branded for life.

"You are looking better than I have seen you look for a week past," said Mrs. Lomax, when he came down to breakfast.

"I'm feeling better, mother. Things have been a bit askew with me lately, but there are signs of clearing."

"You don't usually keep your troubles from me, Griff." The old lady was watching him keenly.

He hesitated a moment, then—

"I will tell you all about it to-night," he said.

And she was satisfied.

Breakfast over, he went and saddled Lassie, and rode to Peewit. Kate was looking drearily out of the window facing Marshcotes when he came in. He strode across the room and took her face in his two big hands and kissed her; it seemed so natural that she well-nigh forgot to rebuke him.

"I have not been here since—since that night—because I was blind to your need," he began. "I never guessed that matters had gone so far. Little woman, have they bullied you while I was away?"

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In response to frequent requests we have pleasure in reprinting the following paragraph, which appeared in the *Quarterly Record* for October, 1899:—

A Man of the Moors, by Halliwell Sutcliffe.—To all those readers who have read this powerful novel, the following attempt to identify the topography of the story by one who is familiar with the locality, may prove interesting:—

Marshcotes.....	Haworth.
Ling Crag	Stanbury.
Marshcotes Manor..	Emmet Hall, Haworth.
Cranshaw	Oxenhope.
Ludworth	Hebden Bridge.
Wynyates Hall	Ponden Hall.
Scartop Water	Ponden Reservoir.
Cringle Wood	Ponden Kirk.
Heathley.....	Keighley.
Landford.....	Bradford.
Saxilton	Bingley.

In her present mood she could not withstand just that kind of tenderness. She crept into his arms, and hid her face, and fondled him nervously with her hands, as if she were afraid of his escaping her.

"Griff, it is hard to bear," she whispered, and broke down utterly. "So long you have kept away from me—it was right, of course—but——"

She looked up after awhile, and dried her eyes, and put him away.

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

He caught at the underlying suggestion, and for the life of him he could not keep the gladness out of his voice.

"Does he mean to apply for a divorce?" he asked.

"Yes."

He pulled himself together. Surely, if he were a man at all, it was the time to think of her needs, not of his own.

"Kate, I have brought all this on you."

But her hands were over his mouth before the words were half out.

"Don't say that, dear. Do you think I didn't help you to it?"

There was no touch of the outside world then. The frank abandonment of that confession left nothing more to be said, or hoped, or striven for.

The feeling passed, and they struggled slowly back to reality, as children make their first tottering attempts to walk.

"We can fight them, Kate, if we will. They have no evidence," said Griff, with an effort.

"They have evidence. Hannah saw us in the parlour that night."

"There was little to see; and in any case her word won't stand alone."

"No; but Joe is ready to swear—— Griff, I will not tell you. You can guess, can't you? He came back in time to see you—and he means to swear that he saw more. Griff, Griff, how can you make me tell you such things?"

"Are you sure of this, Kate?"

"Yes; quite. He blurted it all out to me a few nights

ago in one of his drunken fits. The Marshcotes lawyer has told him what to say, so as best to help Hannah's evidence, and I don't see how we can face it."

A long pause.

"Kate, are you sorry?"

She looked at him—once. A heartful of neglected yearnings came to the front with a rush, and swept her away with them.

"No, no, no," she sobbed.

"Kate," he said, "come back with me to mother. It is the only way. I daren't leave you here an hour longer."

"But, Griff, I can't! Think of how your mother would take it if—— No; I can't! I won't!"

"It's not safe for you here, child; and you are coming," he said peremptorily.

She yielded at last. There did, indeed, seem to be no other way, and she could not bear to let Griff leave her. So together they set off across that well-known strip of heath, Griff leading Lassie by the bridle. Mrs. Lomax was just going out at the Manor gates when they arrived.

"Mother," said Griff, simply, "I have brought Kate to you. You will not bother her with questions, will you? She is tired and ill, and I'll tell you all about it later, as I promised. Will you take her upstairs, and get her to lie down a bit?"

Mrs. Lomax, feeling that some grave trouble was in the air, turned without a word. She took Kate up to her own room, and, because Griff had asked it, she would not let her make excuse of any kind, but forced her to lie down on the bed, with its dimity hangings and its quaint, old-world fragrance of lavender.

"Get to sleep if you can, my dear; you look wearied, and it will be the best thing for you," she said, and went downstairs to Griff.

He was turning a sheet of blue foolscap over and over in his hands. It had come while he was away, and was lying on the hall table when he followed the women indoors. He passed it over to his mother.

"Read that, and don't be shocked, mother," he said quietly.

She settled her spectacles carefully on her nose, and waded through the legal formulæ.

"I didn't think it of you, Griff," was all she said, as she laid the paper down.

But the lines on her old face were working pitiably, and Griff knew what she was suffering.

He made a clean breast of it then, and the cloud on the mother's face lifted a little.

"We shall not defend the action," he finished.

Again the lines of pain struck across the woman's forehead and about her eyes.

"But why, Griff? Surely, after what you have told me, you are not——"

"Guilty? No; but in the eyes of any court we are. The servant was spying on us—Kate told me so to-day. She saw enough to prejudice our case from the start. Then Strangeways returned in time to see me at Peewit the next morning, so the evidence as to my passing the night there is clear enough."

"Yes; but you can prove that it was impossible for you to get home."

"I can; but why was I there as late as eight o'clock—the snow didn't fall thickly till then—with her husband away? Don't you see, mother, everything tells against us? Besides, we have burnt our bridges now; there can be no return for Kate."

She was silent for a space, then—

"Do you want Strangeways to get the divorce, Griff?" she flashed.

"Honestly, yes. But we have no choice in the matter; the verdict is bound to go against us, and it will spare Kate a great deal if we don't appear at all."

Again Mrs. Lomax was silent.

"Griff," she said, with another sudden glance, "do you intend to marry her?"

"I do, mother."

"Look me straight in the eyes, dear. I don't mean to doubt you, you know, if you will only answer me one question. You kissed each other that night; it was a grave wrong-doing. Was there no worse sin than that, Griff? Are you trying to shield the woman by lying to your mother?"

"Mother, mother! Have I ever lied to you?" There was keen reproach in his voice.

"Never, Griff; but, then, you have never been in love before."

"With my mother—always. I swear to you that we are innocent."

"Thank God for that, dear! I am behind the times in such things. It would have killed me, Griff, to think that you could stoop——"

"Hush, mother! Kate is above it, whatever I may be."

A long silence, broken by the patter of sleet against the window.

"You might have married well, Griff."

"Mother, that is not like you. Leave distinctions of that kind to people who cannot claim five hundred years of moor life."

The old lady rose abruptly and went to the window. Blurred eyes saw through blurred panes some gallant hopes she had entertained on her son's behalf—saw the wife she had planned for him; saw jealousy, too, the fierce resentment of a mother who is robbed of her young; saw, finally, the way that meant happiness for Griff.

"You are right, dear," she said, turning and taking his hands in her own lean, weather-stained palms. "If you will always follow your heart, I don't think it will take you far wrong."

The divorce suit was the talk of the artistic sets in London that winter. Griff's society friends chattered about it; the little people who had fumed at his success laughed stridently at his fall.

"Mr. Lomax," purred Belgravia. "Griff Lomax, you know. Of course you have heard? Isn't it *shocking?* To think that

a man of his genius should stoop to an intrigue with a low quarryman's wife!"

"Kissing an' sich; it's fair shameful," muttered Jose Binns to his cows. "Ye mark my words, beästies, there'll no gooid come on 't."

But it was not a matter of the public to Griff Lomax. It was between the woman, the moors, and himself; and he saw full life before him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MOONLIGHT INTRODUCTION.

"WELL?" growled Mother Strangeways, as her grandson pushed his way in between the rickety doorposts of Sorrowstones Spring.

"Well, it's ower an' done wi', for sartin sure. Kate's gone off wi' Griff Lummax."

The old hag toasted her claws at the red peat ashes and chuckled.

"Gone wi' him, didst 'a say? Afore iver yon lawyer chap hed sent 'em his bits o' paper? They mun ha' getten it on their minds, an' proper, not to bide till th' law set 'em free."

Joe shuffled uneasily towards the hearth.

"I misdoubt it, mother; ay, I misdoubt it. Sure as there's a fooil aboon ground, it's young Lummax. He meäns to wed her, an' she'll live off th' fat o' th' land. It war just what they wanted, it war."

"Tha'rt a bonny un, Joe, wi' thy dog i' th' manger ways," croaked the grandmother. "Tha'll be shut o' thy wife for gooid an' all, an' here tha'rt come whining 'cos Kate's made thee a free man."

"But it war just what they wanted, it war," persisted Joe, doggedly. "Without ever a 'by your leave' comes Lummax to Teewit yester morn, an' cuddles an' kisses Kate, an' away they wend to Marshcotes Manor, same as if a man's wife war fair ony fowks's belonging but hisn what wedded her. Ay, an' th' mother took 'em in, too."

"Joe, tha's been lang i' coming. Why didn't 'a slip across th' moor yestreen to tell a body?"

"'Cos I war ower drunk, if tha wants to know." A long-tried sense of the efficacy of this excuse had made it almost a formula with Joe.

She looked at him with a grin of good fellowship; yet under the grin was a touch of wistfulness, a weird, abortive echo of the yearning which had once centred itself round Joe's mother.

"It taks a lot to bring thee to thy grandam, lad. Tha willun't wend a step out o' thy way to clap een on her, without tha's harder set to 't nor or'nary. Tha mud ha' getten drunk here, Joe, if tha'd fashed thyseln to come for 't," she finished, in a plaintive key.

Joe's face cleared perceptibly.

"Hast 'a getten owt to sup, mother?"

Mother Strangeways scrambled to the cupboard, and took out a black bottle.

"Rum, begow!" muttered the son. "Fetch us a mug, mother, an' let's be making a start."

He did make a start, in good earnest, and the old witch joined him. There was but one pewter-pot in the cottage, and this they passed freely from one to the other. The glowing peat lit up their faces, as they sat on either side of the hearth. A little soughing wind was creeping round the chimney-stack.

"It's fine an' lonely up here," said Mother Strangeways at last. "Canst 'a hear th' wind a-sobbing i' th' chimbley, lad? Oh ay, it's easy to mak free wi' th' devil, come storm or calm.' She hugged the bottle to her breast, waiting till Joe should have finished the last of the mugful.

"Doan't! Nay, doan't," he pleaded, with a shiver. "I war niver so fearful fond o' th' devil, an' he flairs me."

"Flairs thee, tha sawny? He's a better mak of a stay-by, let me tell thee, than this God 'at th' pious folk prate on. He made th' marsh, I tak it, what grows a herb to cure all ills. He made th' snaw an' th' frost — ay, th' snaw an' th' frost, what taks th' gentlefolk off now an' again."

She paused to chew the cud of some tasty reminiscence. Then she glanced furtively towards the grandfather's clock

that stood in the corner. Whatever the size of the cottage, and mean as its every other appointment might be, there was always a brave old eight-day clock to be seen in the dwellings on Marshcotes Moor.

The beldame pointed one hand at the clock, while the fingers of the other went scrabbling up and down her ragged skirt.

"Sitha, lad! It wobbles summat fearful, does th' owd clock. First to right, then to left, it wobbles reg'lar. *Tick-tack, tick-tack*, goes th' inside—an' *tick-tack, tick-tack* goes th' outside, keeping time. It's a sign, Joe; I'm noan long for this world, now that th' owd clock hes ta'en to wobbling. Five an' eighty year we've bided together—*tick-tack, tick-tack*, me an' th' clock —an' now it's started to dither. Tha'll noan hev a grandam sooin, Joe."

"Tha'rt drunk," muttered Strangeways, succinctly.

She set her hands on her hips, and grinned into Joe's face.

"Drunk, babby, sayst 'a? Me drunk while tha's sober, tha kittling? Nay, it taks a bottle or two to come it ower Mother Strangeways. I tell thee it wobbles, does th' eight-day clock. Lad, tha mud do thy grandam a sarvice." Her eyes grew bright with a sudden earnestness. "Bring a two or three screw-nails wi' thee th' next time tha comes, an' fasten th' clock to th' wall; it'll happen keep me a while longer."

"Tha'rt feared o' th' grave, seemingly, if tha'rt noan feared o' th' devil," sneered the man.

She was quiet for awhile; then she kicked the smouldering peat into a whirr of angry sparks.

"Ay, that I am, till I've settled old scores wi' them Lummaxes. It's little rest there'd be for Rachel Strangeways, ligging i' her grave, if Griff an' his mother war laughing aboon sod. An' all to be done by myseln," she added reflectively; "me eighty an' more, wi' only a misbegotten fooil of a man to help me—an' him sitting, stark-witted, wi' his clumsy hands i' his pockets. Joe, durst 'a kill young Griff, if tha'd getten him safe to grund, nobbut wanting a stamp o' thy foot to finish him?"

"I durst that; thee bide till I've getten th' chance; thee bide a bit."

"I've bided ower long a'ready."

They fell into a moody silence. A gleam of triumph shot into Rachel's skinny face.

"Lad, it's th' best news I've heärd for mony a long day, this o' young Lummax's wedding Kate. Let 'em be, an' Griff 'ull find his mistake out; she's noan his sort, an' he's noan hers —they'll fratch, an' proper, after a two or three week. Teed by th' tail, teed by th' tail; lad, they'll scrat each other's een out!"

The bottle was finished, and Joe felt no further inducement to stay.

"Good neet, mother. I'm wishing tha'd talk a bit less an' do a bit more."

Rachel gave vent to her tongue at that, and rated him till her face went purple. But she changed her key just as Joe was shutting the door behind him.

"Joe, lad!" she called.

He pushed his head round the corner.

"Hast a' nearly done wi' thy foulness, or how like?" he demanded.

"Ay, I've done. Tha willun't forget th' screw-nails, wilt 'a? Day in an' day out th' owd clock wobbles summat fearful."

"I'll noan forget." And he shuffled off into the moonlight.

About the time that Mother Strangeways was cursing her grandson by every epithet known to the brisk upland vocabulary, Lomax and Kate were talking together in the cosy Manor parlour.

"Don't plead against me, Kate," he was saying. "You know I oughtn't to stay here till we are free to marry."

"But that will be months yet, you say—a whole six months at the soonest. Griff, I shall want you to death before the waiting is over."

His arms went round her at that; but he had made up his mind, and nothing could turn him aside.

"We must give ourselves a chance," he said gruffly, setting her away from him. "What can folk help but think, if you

and I live here while the case is pending? You might help me a little, Kate; it is not too easy for me."

She gripped his arm with quick, passionate strength.

"You shan't go back to London, if I have to hang round your neck like a millstone. They are too fond of you there; you'll go to your fine ladies, and you'll talk and laugh and flirt, and they will make me look silly in your thoughts. You shan't go there, I tell you!"

Griff laughed mightily; and "Wife," said he—she quickened to the premature tenderness of the word—"wife, I was never sure till this moment that you loved me; but now I know it. What! you're jealous."

"Jealous or not," she retorted—but the softness was gaining in her cheeks—"it will break my heart if you go to London."

"Then I won't! There, does that satisfy you?"

With a woman's swift returning on her own paces, "Griff," she whispered, "do you want to go? I'm foolish, and if you really want——"

"It's the last place I should think of, child. I shall go only as far as the other end of Yorkshire, where I shall be within hail if you really want me. You'll write every day?"

She lowered her eyes shamefacedly.

"I write a poor letter, Griff. They'd only shame you."

Again he laughed, a frank, untroubled laugh.

"We shall see about that, wife. Every day you will write to me, and every day I'll write to you. God! how long those months will be!"

Mrs. Lomax decided at this juncture that they had had quite enough time together, and she entered abruptly.

"Off with you to bed, Kate," she said. "Griff is sadly dependent on the look of a woman's face, and if you spoil yours by late hours, I won't be answerable for the consequences."

"But I will!" cried Lomax, gaily.

"You have arranged it all?" asked the mother, when they were left alone.

"Yes; I am to leave to-morrow, to return when—we are free."

"Well, Griff?"

"You are a brick! To treat Kate as you have done——"

"Be quiet, boy! You are either the wisest man in the world, or the veriest fool. I love Kate; so do you. We can only wait and see how it all turns out. Are you coming to bed, too?"

"Not just yet. I must have a mouthful of fresh air before I turn in."

He held open the door for her, and they walked upstairs together, his arm threaded through hers.

"Good night, mother," he said, as they gained the landing; "don't worry about things, will you?"

"Not too much, Griff; I am a woman of sound common sense. Good night."

He went downstairs again, picked up a cap from the hall table, and went out. He was restless to the point of fever, and nothing but the sharp night air and the free use of his limbs could give him a wink of sleep that night. Swinging off into the Marshcotes Moor, he speedily found himself at the farm that fronted Hazel Dene; then, bethinking him of that parsley-field which had so mystified Miller Rotherson, and remembering, as a natural corollary, certain of the poaching fraternity of Ling Crag, he turned up the Dene. A light was burning in Greta's room as he passed the mill, and he glanced up at it with a warm splash of feeling at his heart.

"Poor lassie!" he muttered. "I wonder how soon that witless preacher will get at a pretty woman's meaning?"

He paused, with a poacher's instinct, as he neared the gate that opened into the parsley-field. The moon was scarcely past full, and every bent and clump of bracken stood out clear in the bluish light. In the middle of the field a hare was squatting—a big fellow, with a body as still as sleep, and a head that shifted warily this way and that, to learn if there were any danger abroad. The night air crawled into Griff's throat, and he could not keep back one little gasp of a cough. Straight

as a die the hare made for a point in one of the boundary walls; there was a succession of sharp cries, like the cries of a teething baby, and after that a silence.

"There's one of the boys over there; I'll have a word with him," thought Griff.

He crossed the field quietly, and skimmed over the wall through which the hare had disappeared. A surly "Who's there?" greeted him as he dropped on to the grass, almost into the arms of a burly, grizzled five-feet-ten of iniquity, standing with the dead body of a hare in his hands.

"You ought to know me by this time, Will Reddiough," laughed Griff, softly.

"It's ye, sir, is 't? That shapes things different, like." A genial grin overspread Will's knotty features as he recognized the intruder.

"What luck?"

"Nobbut a couple, an' I've carred two hour under th' wall for 'em."

"Well, it's poor sport, netting, at the best of times. First, you have to slink round here in the daytime, and see which way the hares take home again; then you've to wait under a wall till the frost nips you; and at the end of it all you have precious little to show. I say, Will, what fools these hares are always to go through the same hole!"

"No more fooils nor men-folk, what allus taks th' same stile through a field. An' if they war sharper, sir, what 'ud be th' use o' setting a net?" Will smiled at the transparency of his own reasoning; he could not conceive a scheme of the universe in which poaching-nets played no part.

"But look here, Will," said Lomax, after a pause of rumination, "if my training goes for anything, I know that a hare never starts home from its feed till the day is breaking, unless some one disturbs it."

"Rarely, sir, not *never*. To speak plain, I war main stalled o' ligging on th' kitchen settle, so I like as I thowt I'd try a bit o' sport for myseln. It's a matter o' chance, so to say. I've getten two to-neet just by carring an' biding;

another neet I mud ha' hed to bide till morn, an' niver cotch an odd 'un."

"Why didn't you bring Dan o' Smick's or some of the others along with you?"

Will Reddiough drew his lips in, and thrust his cheeks out; he gave forth a low whistle of disgust, tempered with charity for a fellow-mortal's failings.

"Dan's a-coorting, an' he wouldn't stir till latter on. Ye'll be knowing what a sight o' folly a wench can pump into a decent man's body. Then Jack o' Ling Crag, he couldn't come afore his public shut, an' so wi' th' rest. So I like as I thowt——"

"Till later on," echoed Griff, softly. "Does that mean there is fun on hand?"

"Well, sir, I willun't deny there's a mak on a party, like, what's due to meet i' Cringle Wood for a bit o' pheasant-shooiting, soon as th' mooin gets ower Cranshaw Kirk."

"The old lot—Dan o' Smicks, Jack o' Ling Crag, you and Ned Kershaw?"

"Ay, th' owd lot. Jack war for sending word to ye, but Ned Kershaw, he up and said——"

"Said what?"

"Well, 'at ye'd getten your hands full a'ready. Ned allus war one for making a crack," added Reddiough, apologetically.

Griff cursed a little under his breath, then laughed.

"As it happens, I am as free as can be till the daylight comes. Gad, Will, I feel the old stuff working in me! Do you care to take me with you?"

"Ay, and proud to do it, sir! Just like thy father—just," he muttered approvingly, as he bundled his net together and took the hares in his left hand. "It'll be close on th' time, I'm thinking. Let's get a squint at Cranshaw."

Will scrambled to the top of an adjacent knoll, used the church as a guide to other matters than that for which it was primarily intended, and intimated that they might as well be setting off. Cringle Wood lay half a mile west of Wynyates

—a steep-sided crack in the moor face, sparsely set with oak and birch, and a favourite haunt of such pheasants as had grown tired of the preserves further down the valley. Kershaw and Dan o' Smicks were there before them, and Jack o' Ling Crag was not long in putting in an appearance. Jack's face, when he espied Lomax, left no doubt as to his satisfaction touching the addition to their little shooting-party. It was a marvellous night; just a touch of frost, but not enough to whiten the masses of ruddy brown bracken that grew between the dotted tree-stems; here and there a fat old pheasant-father, standing out clear against the sky as he perched on his branch of oak. *Pop-pop* went the guns. Griff did not trouble about the fact that he was unarmed; the mere potting at sitting birds was dull sport in itself, and the adventure was all that he cared about.

"The keepers have been pretty quiet lately, haven't they?" said Griff to Jack o' Ling Crag, as the latter picked up a bird.

"Oh, ay, sir, quiet as church mice. There's noan so mony pheasants i' Cringle Wood as there war, an' they've enough to do to look after th' regular preserves down below. 'Tain't worth while, th' Squire thinks, to meddle wi' Cringle Wood. It warn't allus so, though, by a long chalk, as you an' me mind, I'll warrant. Dost recall that neet——"

He stopped. Five shouts came from five different quarters of the wood. Dan o' Smicks and Ned Kershaw came running downhill to join their comrades, and five men converged towards them at a steady run.

"No shooiting, lads!" cried Jack, getting the hang of the situation in a moment. "At 'em wi' th' butt-end, but doan't shooit. Fair fight, an' a race for home after ye've settled 'em. Blazes! but there's Squire hisseln!"

His last item of information was lost to all but Lomax, who was nearest him. They were all at close quarters now, and the tussle began in earnest. As luck had it, the four keepers and Griff's three allies were well to one side when the fight was fairly started. Griff was aware of a big, rough-hewn man fronting him; his face showed knotty in the moonlight, and he

laughed a great, hearty laugh from his belly upwards. It was the Squire of Saxilton.

"You've no gun!" cried old Roger Daneholme.

"No; but I've got the fists that God gave me. Drop your gun, and come on."

The Squire chucked his weapon into the bracken, and they ran together like steel to magnet. In and out darted the blows; Roger Daneholme took a crack on the mouth that rattled his teeth in their sockets, and Griff lost the aid of his left eye for the time being. It was neck or nothing with Griff. In among the stress, he found time to wonder how he could have been fool enough to mix himself up with a poaching affray, now that Kate had made things matter so much more; it was all very well in his bachelor days, but he should have had more sense now. Suppose he were collared and run in, along with these jolly boon companions of his? He pondered a trifle too long on that aspect of the case, for the Squire got in a body-blow, that came dangerously near to taking his adversary's wind. All the while the tussle of four against four was running a brisk course on the left; curses and blows thwacked through the frosty air with cheery impartiality; but Jack o' Ling Crag was laughing, and Griff gathered that the three were having the best of it—though his notions of everything outside the radius of the Squire's fists were of necessity in the shadowy background of his mind. At last Griff got his chance, and took it. Old Roger again aimed a bit too high for his wind, and he responded with a clean-cut drive from his left that got the Squire full between the eyes, planting him squarely in the bracken. He showed no disposition to come up to scratch again, and Griff looked to see if he were needed elsewhere. But the keepers had had the worst of the tussle; they had been driven back towards the wood-bottom, and the poachers four were making the best of their way towards Wynyates. Jack o' Ling Crag stopped at the top of the wood to see how it fared with Lomax; the others were well ahead of him, and did not notice the stoppage, their guiding rule on these occasions being to take a bee-line for home.

And somehow it fell about that Jack, the old reprobate, grew so keen on the mighty battle going on below him that he forgot all about his own safety. The keepers rallied, just as Griff put in his farewell smack at his opponent; two went to tackle Lomax, and two made up the hill towards Jack o' Ling Crag.

"Come on!" shouted Jack. "Run for your life, ye fool! What are ye stopping for?"

To tell the truth, Griff had characteristically lost sight of prudence; how could he leave the Squire, stretched stark before him, without at least a passing attempt to bring him round? He looked towards the stream that tumbled through Cringle Wood, and was setting off to fetch water in his cap when a pair of lusty arms gripped him from behind. His next clear conception of outward things was, that he was lying on his back, looking up at the Milky Way.

"The game's up at last," he groaned. "Dad would never have been such a dolt—and how will it strike Kate?"

"Much as you struck Squire," put in one of the keepers, facetiously—"straight atween the eyes."

Griff bit his lip; he had not known that he was talking aloud.

Then, to make matters worse, down came the other pair of the Squire's party, with Jack o' Ling Crag between them. Old Roger Daneholme opened his eyes presently; they doused him with cold water, and before long he was on his feet again.

"We've got two of 'em, Squire," said a keeper.

"Eh? Got what?" he muttered, still dazed.

"Two of the poaching wastrels."

The Squire looked at Griff and grinned.

"*Wastrels*, say you? Well, if you feel that way, I'll watch while any one of you four have a go at our friend there. You don't seem anxious. Let him free, then, you fools, and don't sit on his chest as if he was a damned armchair."

Griff, freed from constraint, leaped to his feet; he began to think that there was hope for him yet if he had to deal with Roger Daneholme.

"What's your name?" queried the Squire, taking a long pull at his flask.

"Griff Lomax."

"What, Joshua Lomax's son? Gad, I wish he'd been alive to see you fight! I knew him well; we were lads together, and many a night he's helped me to take my father's game. That's it, you see. The light's a bit queer down in the wood here, and I thought you were Walter, my son. Time and again I've tried to spot him at the old game—runs in the family, you'll observe—and I wanted to see if I was a match for him yet. You're about his build and height—but, by hell, you've a better notion of your fists! I never knew a cleaner shot than that you felled me with—not that I saw it very clearly—but it was such a devilish kingdom-come blow for me. Lomax, I'm proud to meet you."

The keepers stared open-eyed at this last freak of the Squire's. They fancied they knew the ins-and-outs of their master pretty well by this time, but they were not prepared for this. Jack o' Ling Crag swore a soft oath, and decided that old Roger was a likelier man than he'd thought him. The Squire turned sharply.

"Who's that? Why, it's Jack o' Ling Crag, if I'm not mistaken. So we've got you at last, Jack, have we? Well, you've had a fair run."

"You're not going to run him in?" said Griff, quickly.

"Why not? He's the rankest poacher in the county."

"So am I, then."

"Oh, that's another matter! You do it for fun, God bless you! you're a sportsman—but Jack here does it by profession. I never could stand a man who does things by profession."

"All right, Squire," responded Griff; "we'll go together, Jack and I."

Old Roger looked hard at him, and saw that he meant it. He stamped up and down for a while; then—

"I'm a precious fool to do it, but, if you put it that way, Jack shall have a bit longer run. Off you go, the pair of you. I say, Lomax, by the way, you'd better come and dine with me."

"I can't, I'm sorry to say—I leave here to-morrow."

"For good?"

"For six months or so."

"Why couldn't you say so? Ride over to Saxilton when you come back—send a line to Plover Court, you know. Men mostly can't fight nowadays; they're rare birds, not to be missed."

"Well, I'm blowed!" muttered Jack, as he and Griff picked their way homewards.

"Exactly," answered Lomax. And never a word besides did they utter till they parted at the door of the Dog and Grouse.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRENDER'S FOLLY.

When Griff reached home and looked at himself in the glass, he was struck by the disarrangement of his features. The left eye was swollen and rapidly discolouring; his upper lip was pretty badly bruised; and a deepish cut in one cheek was still bleeding fitfully. These, and a few minor blemishes, helped to make up a picture that was far from prepossessing; it occurred to him that Kate would think it a bad start, if he appeared on the morrow in this guise. The more he thought of it, the more clearly he saw that he must get away from Marshcotes before the household was up, leaving a good-bye behind him. He stole out of his room and across the landing. A light shone under Mrs. Lomax's door, and he knocked gently.

"Come in!" called the old lady, who had long ago recognized his footfall on the stairs. She was sitting up in bed, with a thick shawl drawn close about her shoulders and a book on her knees.

"What! reading in the middle of the night? Fie, mother."

"I have been troubled lately, dear; it takes an old woman longer to reconcile herself to a change—do you understand? Why, Griff, what *have* you been doing to your face?"

"I don't look exactly pretty, do I? I've had a lively discussion touching the rights of property, and this is the outcome."

"Poaching again, boy?" sighed the mother. "I had hoped, since you came back—but, there, I might as well try

to keep a duck from the water. Let me be doing something to your face, at any rate."

"No, don't bother. I'll get a slice of raw beef and paste it over the eye. I want you to do something else for me, though, mother."

"Well?"

"You have seen me like this before, but Kate hasn't. I was going to leave to-morrow in any case. If I pack my bag now and slip off by the early coach from Heathley, will you make matters right with Kate?"

"But where are you going?"

"Up to North Yorkshire. I had a letter from Framlingham the other day—you remember Framlingham?—he is playing the hermit up there in an out-of-the-way shooting-box of his, and he gave me *carte blanche* to run up when, and for as long as, I liked. After I leave him, I must put on my time as best I can until the divorce business is through. Mother, you will look after *my wife?* I hate to leave her. Strangeways may be up to mischief, you know. Don't let her go out alone, will you?"

The old lady smiled at him, very tenderly and a little ruefully.

"You are a muddle of a man, Griff; I sometimes wonder how you manage to come through things as well as you do. First, you rush off on a harum-skarum prank the night but one after taking big responsibilities on your shoulders; then, you come to me with all kinds of suggestions for taking care of Kate; finally, you will leave us in the lurch, us two poor women, to fight out a trying time together."

"I'll stay, mother! It was your suggestion, to start with, that I should——"

"You can't stay," said Mrs. Lomax, quietly.

"Well, but you seem——"

"Don't bother me with logic, when I am suffering from feelings. Off you go, boy; you can trust me with your treasure-trove. Don't forget to put the beef on your eye; you have no idea what a fright you look."

So Griff was well on his way north by the time that Kate had opened her eyes and had wondered anew at the strangeness of her surroundings. Mrs. Lomax contrived an explanation of her son's early departure, not without sundry concessions to her principles of honesty, and the two women began their dreary, uneventful waiting time. There were legal delays, first of all; and when at last the case had come on for trial, and Strangeways had obtained the verdict of the court, there was a further wait until the decree could be made absolute. The interval, indeed, was then only half what it is to-day, but to Kate, in her present condition of nervous dread, three months seemed a veritable eternity.

It was a wretched winter, too, for Gabriel Hirst. He was troubled, to begin with, by the difficulty of reconciling Griff's innocence with his action in carrying off Kate Strangeways to the Manor. Griff had given his word that they were innocent, and innocent therefore they must be—yet, "it looked queer to a plain man's way of thinking." Then, Greta was becoming positively vixenish; the preacher's helplessness, his dog-like devotion, his womanish beating about the bush, got on the poor lassie's nerves at last, till she was driven, from sheer inability to bear it any longer, to follow Griff's example and migrate for a while to an atmosphere less strained. She met Gabriel as she was lumbering across the square that fronted the Black Bull, in the one rickety chaise which Marshcotes possessed.

"How do you do, Mr. Hirst?" she said, leaning out of the window and beckoning him to approach.

The driver pulled up his nag—never a matter of serious difficulty—and Gabriel came to the door.

"Good morning; are you—are you leaving us?" he stammered, keeping the little gloved hand in his, for very forgetfulness of all that lay without the pretty, frost-kindled face, with its mocking lips.

"Yes, for a few weeks. It is so dull here, month in and month out, isn't it? *Such* a bother I had to get father to let me go—but aunt has begged me to stay with her for such

a long while past, that I could hardly have got out of it this time. Do you never go away, Mr. Hirst?"

"I? Not often. I like the old place well enough, when——"

"Yes, when?"

"When folks treat a man as if he was something better than the mud under their high-heeled boots," said the preacher, with sudden savagery. This pretty scrap of womanhood, with her warm white flesh nestling cosily into her wraps—why did he let himself be driven by her out of his wonted sober courses? For a half-moment, the man of God could have strangled this mocking daughter of Eve.

"I never was treated in that way, so I can't tell; besides, my boots aren't high-heeled," she added inconsequently.

The driver was beating his hands across his chest to keep the cold out, and Greta bethought her of the coach.

"You'll make me late for the coach at Heathley, Mr. Hirst. Good-bye; won't it be a relief to you to have me out of the village? I tease you so, and I believe you don't half like it."

Gabriel Hirst stood there like a fool in the middle of the road, and watched the chaise disappear over the crest of the ill-paved street. Anger had gone from him; religion had gone from him; he was only dazedly conscious of that furry vision which had left him with a careless gibe. He never knew of the bitter tears shed by this same furry vision, who was really no more than a healthy young maiden, with all a life's desires before her; never guessed that she wept through half her journey, and wanted to weep out the other half, had there been tears enough to draw upon, and no one to see them fall.

Altogether, when Christmas Day came and the bells rang out their message, in the hearty country way, there was little responsive joy in the hearts of many of the dwellers by Marshcotes Moor. Mrs. Lomax, though every day seemed to bring Kate nearer to her, was as yet far from accepting the situation; she remembered other Christmases, when she had had Griff all to herself—further back, too, when her husband was alive, and they had framed great plans for the future of a certain toddling

hopeful. Who was this strange woman, that she should upset a lifetime of hopes and fears, lightly as if they had been a card-house? And Kate felt her position keenly; she was soon to be branded in the eyes of all who knew her as a woman of bad repute, and it cut her pride to the quick. Then she would cease, for a whole day together, to care what any one thought of her, so long as she had Griff; but after that would come a bitter sense that he was far away from her, and a dread of what might happen in the interim. Like all superstitious people, she thought of Providence as an agent whose unalterable aim it was to defeat the plans of mortals when they were aiming for the highest happiness; it seemed inconceivable that nothing should step in to thwart them at the last. Griff was shooting—there was a whole crop of terrors to be gleaned from that knowledge alone; accidents were so easy, and the chance fall of a trigger was as simple an agent as Providence could well find. It was in vain that Mrs. Lomax, with her cheery common sense, strove to put such dreads away from her; and Griff's frequent letters—they came, if the truth must out, three times a week—did less to comfort Kate than one good, hearty hand-grip could have effected.

But there was more than theoretic dread abroad; there was real tragedy between Ling Crag Moor to the west and Cranshaw Moor to the east—as Roddick knew to his cost.

Roddick was shaving when the sound of the Marshcotes bells came through the frosty air on Christmas morn. He grinned savagely at his own reflection in the glass, and cut himself badly on the chin, under the delusion that he was uttering a biting sarcasm.

"Peace on earth," he muttered, as he sought for a cobweb on the well-lined walls of his bedroom. "Good-will towards men; I know the old tomfoolery by heart," he growled, applying the cobweb to his chin.

The old woman who came for a few hours each morning—his only servant—was planting a smoking coffee-pot on the table when he came downstairs.

"A merry Kirsmas, sir, to ye," she croaked.

"Thanks; the same to you," said Roddick, dryly. "Oh, by the way, isn't there some superstition about the season—something about coin of the realm, and other things that really touch people's hearts? Mrs. Whitaker, would you like a Christmas-box?"

He amused himself for a while, as his way was, in watching the old creature squirm from one embarrassment to another. First, she feared he would see how anxious she was in the matter, and then she feared he wouldn't; it was an unfair advantage, she felt, to take of a woman "that had allus had her own living to addle, but what war noan dependant on onybody's charity, for all that."

Roddick grew swiftly weary of her—weary, with one of his hot, insane frenzies. He tossed her a sovereign, as he would have thrown a bone to his dog, and turned to his eggs and bacon.

"That will do for to-day," he snapped. "You can leave as soon as your legs will carry you."

"But there's th' kitchen not fettled up yet, an' th' bedroom——" began the woman.

"Well, they must wait till to-morrow. I can't stand your clatter, clatter, clatter, upstairs and down. Heaven knows why it allowed man to hit on the notion of clogs!"

Mrs. Whitaker was not insensible to fear of her master's black moods; but it shocked her sense of decency that the domestic rites should go unperformed.

"Axing your pardon, sir, what'll you do for th' Kirsmas dinner? There's th' turkey to be roasted, an' th' sauce to be made, an' th' plum pudding——"

"Confound the lot of them! I shall dine off cheese and bread. Good day, Mrs. Whitaker."

The woman made off with what speed she could muster, realizing that Roddick was not all a God-fearing man should be, yet inclined—in the light of the golden sovereign clutched in her withered palm—to make allowance for the most sinful of masters on the blessed Christmas Day.

Roddick finished his breakfast, and pulled round his chair to the fire.

"Humph!" growled he, lighting his pipe. "Now we'll salute the happy morn, and be as jolly as we're bound to be. What a rum sort of place the world is!"

He read till twelve o'clock, and had just thrown down his book in disgust, when there came a knock at the outer door. His face brightened as he saw the wiry little man in velveteen who stood on the threshold.

"Oh, it's you, Riggs, is it? Come in. Have you got a message for me?"

"Yes, sir; from Miss Laverack. I'm to wait for an answer, sir."

Roddick jerked open the envelope, and ran his eye over the note. He tried to keep back any hint of the passion that warmed his blood at sight of the well-known handwriting; but the man in velveteen had not been a keeper for fifteen years without acquiring a quick eye.

"All right. I'll scribble an answer at once. What will you take, Riggs? Beer—whisky?"

He was not long in returning with his reply to the letter, and Riggs also left Wynyates with a well-defined feeling that Mr. Roddick came very seasonably.

"Only, what I fear is, that I'll be blabbing about the business to the wife one day," muttered the keeper; "and then it would be as good as all up with the young miss. What them two would do without a well-meaning, close-mouthed chap like me to help 'em, beats me. I wonder what's wrong with this Mr. Roddick, and why they can't make a clean breast of it to the Captain? It's plain to be seen they're over ears in love one with t'other; he's just got to that time of life, has Mr. Roddick, when it does take a man mortal hard if he once let's himself be collared. Well, well, there'll be a pretty reckoning between me and the Captain if ever my share in the game comes out."

As for Roddick, the brief message contained in Janet Laverack's note had altered his mood completely. "I begin to believe in the good-will nonsense," he said to his pipe. Even so short a spell of solitude as he had already tried had sufficed to induce the bad habit of talking aloud. He went

and looked out of doors. "A fine day, too—just the sort of day one always reads about, but which doesn't usually turn up in practice. Every meeting means so much more sheer madness, but what of that? We'll make a good day of it, and leave the rest to the Providence I was kicking at a moment ago."

The ground was too slippery to encourage riding. He swallowed some food standing, and set off on foot at a brisk pace across Ling Crag Moor. Thence he gained Marshcotes Moor, struck into an ill-defined track that brought him out at Sorrowstones Spring, went a little way down the highroad at this point, and turned into the fields behind the Quarryman's Arms. Soon he was on the moor again, with frozen peat for a road, and sharp, dry air for stimulus.

On he strode till Lawfoot Water lay below him, with the reddening sun shimmering across the ice. Another turn, sharp to the right, past the further edge of the water, led him at the end of half an hour more to the crest of the ridge overlooking Frender's Folly.

Fifty years before, Luke Frender had ridden safely and well on the top of the rising trade-tide. When he sold his cotton-mill at Lutherton, and the business appertaining thereto, he was still a young man, with a taste for high living, and half a million sterling in the bank. Being a man of some imagination, and anxious to use his money in ways that had not occurred to his neighbours, he built himself a huge place in the very heart of the moors—not an ordinary square-built mansion with stuccoed walls, but a faithful imitation of the mediæval. There is a spacious courtyard on the north side, with a fountain in the middle, guarded by four great stone dogs. Loop-holes grin from the castle walls, and at one corner the steps of an unbuilt tower climb up to the second-floor windows. The windows are long, narrow, deep-browed; and here and there crumbling warts of masonry are tacked on to the walls. As it stands to-day, blackened by fifty years of the wind and rain and frost that is no child's play in the heart of Cranshaw Moor, Castle Frender—better known to the neighbourhood as Frender's Folly—has a certain dignity of its own. If it

be palpably an imitation, it is at least not jerry-built. Its walls are thick and well knit; its situation is harsh to the verge of terror; and the smooth lawns, the sweeping circle of carriage drive, the banked masses of rhododendron that climb the valley sides, serve only to accentuate the unshorn roughness that hems them in.

Nor is the Folly wanting in tradition of a sombre sort; short as its life has been, it has lived fast, just as its stones have greyed before their time. Luke Frender gambled away his money, his credit—his wife, too, some say—within its walls; and he shot himself in the big room overlooking the courtyard, which, half in mockery, he had built to serve as a private chapel. Then the friend who had robbed him of money and wife alike, lived on at the castle, and took to hard drinking, and died in raving delirium; his son, succeeding to the property, married one of his own housemaids, realized in a very brief time that he, too, had sold his honour to the devil, and avenged Luke Frender's end, in a fashion, by hanging himself to a beam in the same private chapel overlooking the great gateway and the courtyard. This was five years before Captain Laverack bought the place. Its history had become common talk throughout the countryside; prospective buyers shunned alike the grimness of its surroundings and the uncanny trend of its history, and Laverack had been able to buy it for a tithe of the amount which had originally been spent on the building. The shooting was excellent, and the situation exactly such a one as the Captain, in the present state of his domestic affairs, would have chosen before all others.

Roddick knew nothing of the story attaching to Frender's Folly, except that the building was almost of yesterday; yet now, as he looked down on that level circle of lawn and shrubbery, with the gloomy pile at its centre, he felt no whit disposed to gibe at the pretentiousness of what he had once termed the Cotton Castle. The sun, a crimson ball, was touching the moor-edge with its lower rim; a grey gloaming crept across the everlasting waste of heath; the wind sobbed piteously. A strip of green, a fringe of naked branches, a broad

band of moor, were mirrored dimly in the big lake that stretched to the northern end of the valley. It was all inexpressibly lonesome, terrible beyond words.

The sun died wholly, while Roddick crept down the hill-side towards the trysting-place. He awoke from his sense of awe to find that his eyes were wet and his throat troubled. He cursed himself for a fool, but the pity had gripped his heart, for all that; the pathos that underlies all this bluster and wildness of the moors had struck to some inner sense, and made him womanish. He shivered as he stood beneath the grim old fir-tree that had found it hard work enough to stick to its post halfway up the hill-side. A sheep, away above him on the moor, bleated its half-witted protest against the fate that had set it there. If only a good, honest dog would give one good, honest bark, thought Roddick, he would not mind it half as much.

But the ungainly brute—half mastiff, half collie—that came creeping up towards the trysting-oak uttered no bark. He crouched close to Roddick's side, and wagged his rope of a tale, and smuggled his head into the man's hand for approbation; but he had been trained to hold his tongue, and he feared rebuke from the girl who followed him a few paces behind.

"Janet!"

No other word came to Roddick's lips. The tragedy, the desolation, the pathos,—they were all absorbed in that slim, girlish figure whose every line betokened eagerness. Wreck and ruin were chiselled deep into the stones below them; yearning that had no limits, aloofness that dared not seek for sympathy, were above them; but they two were close in each other's arms, and looked neither above nor below.

"Leo," she said at last, "was I foolish to drag you so far across the moor?"

"Be quiet, child!"

"I would have met you nearer Wynyates, but I could not get away for long enough. There is a crowd of people down there, dear, all expecting me to entertain them."

"Let them expect," muttered Roddick, gruffly.

As of old, he understood the folly of these meetings; the strain was greater than any sane man would subject himself to willingly.

"But I shall be missed if I stay here long, and I dread father finding us out; it would put an end to—to all the world, I think, Leo."

"Janet!" he said sharply.

"Yes?" She looked up, shocked by his tone.

"You shall not say those things. Do you know what it makes me ready to do—when you show your naked heart to me like that? It makes me tell myself that I have only to carry you away from all this to put an end to the struggle. You are such a flimsy weight, too; I could carry you with ease, whether you liked it or not, and then——"

He stopped. A supple strength came into the girl's figure—a strength one would not have expected from its slenderness.

"Leo," she said slowly, "I ask nothing better. I am not afraid to face it."

He hesitated—just for one half-moment. Then he shook her as if she had been a naughty child.

"You little fool! Who *is* afraid to face a danger that he does not understand? If ever you dare to try me as far as that again, I'll—— Good God, Janet!" he broke off, with irritable tenderness, "you mustn't cry. Can't you see that a man who wants to be—unselfish, you know, and nonsense of that kind—has to behave like a fiend incarnate. It's easy to be soft when you have not to keep the fight hot in you."

"Leo," said she, "if you don't kiss me at once, I shall hate you for ever.—Have you stopped to think," she went on, as if in apology for obtaining her demand, "to think what the life here means to me? I loathe the moors; they frighten me; it is all so dreary. And the people father brings to make things livelier for me, they only aggravate the loneliness. Leo, if I were one little bit *more* of a fool, I should either cry myself blind or—well, the lake is deep enough, and the cold would only be for the first minute or two."

Roddick's voice was in rags when he spoke.

"I'm a brute, child; why didn't you learn it in time?"

He took her to him, and petted her with a helpless mixture of the father and the lover that was infinitely pitiable.

"Leo," she whispered, looking up and smiling through her sobs, "is this our happy Christmas?"

Before Roddick could reply, the dog began to whine in a way that called for attention. He had his nose to the ground, and evidently scented something not to his liking. Then he was off like a rocket, and a dismal shriek came from a clump of heather just above them. The night was clear, with stars enough to show things in a sort of gloaming light. In the middle of the clump was a writhing mass of rags and dishevelled hair.

"My wife, by ——! Janet, call off the dog and run back home. It is no place for you!" cried Roddick.

But Tramp was too excited to hear the girl's call. He was running round and round the figure, a stifled bark cutting into his growls now and then. Janet ran forward and gripped him by the collar—none too soon, for every moment he was on the point of making a spring. The figure got up out of the heather. Roddick cursed the light, because it was enough to show Janet the hideous contortions of the creature's face.

The silence grew unbearable.

"Well, what are you doing here?" demanded Roddick.

"Nay, Leo, you mustn't speak to me like that, when I've followed you, mile on mile, across the desolate places. Will you never learn what a true woman's love means?"

Janet winced cruelly. Roddick's eyes blazed as he watched the delicate girl shrink from this evil hag who was yet his wife.

"How often must I tell you to stay where you are bidden?" The effort to keep his hands off was trying him sorely.

"I can't obey when I'm drunk, Leo—I can't. I go wild for you, I—— Who's the white girl standing there?"

"Janet, go, I tell you! Go!"

She shook off the numbness that held her.

"I can't, I won't, leave you! Leo, are not your battles mine? How can I leave you to face—that?"

"Why didn't we let the dog do its work?" muttered Roddick.

Janet caught the words and gripped him by the arm.

"No, no—not that, Leo. That is what I meant—you will kill her if I leave you, and we should lose our chance of happiness, you and I, for ever. Oh, can't you see it? You who shook the breath out of my body because I asked you to take me away."

The creature glared from one to another and tried to speak, but Roddick checked her roughly.

"It is better to run away than commit murder," went on the girl, with eager persistence. "Will nothing make you understand, Leo?"

He pulled himself together.

"It is well to do neither, child. You can trust me."

"Will you swear to do—that thing—no harm?"

"Yes, I swear it. Now go."

She hesitated, glanced at the bundle of rags, then held up her face. He kissed it gravely.

"That is our protest, dear," she said.

He watched her out of sight. He turned to the wife of his bosom.

"Come along, you devil!" he said dispassionately.

Together they set off across the moor. Roddick laughed harshly from time to time.

CHAPTER XV.

A HOME-COMING.

THE mistal at the rear of Gabriel Hirst's house was noisy, this May evening, with the clatter of milking-pails, the mooing of cattle in their stalls, and the semi-audible running comments of Jose Binns. Jose, it will be remembered, in addition to looking after the chapel and giving sound advice to the preacher, was Gabriel's right hand in the management of the farm.

Now the Ling Crag folk were keen as nails in their bargainings with the Almighty, and they were just as keen in their conduct of more carnal transactions. Jose Binns, indeed, had a really remarkable aptitude for trafficking of both sorts; it was his favourite occupation, while milking or engaged in any other work that left his thoughts free, to drive imaginary bargains with non-existent purchasers touching property which was not his to sell. This was his substitute for the reading of fiction, and it certainly betokened a higher order of intelligence than that of the merely practical man who chaffers with realities.

The mistal door stood open to-night. Jose and the roan cow he was milking showed vague at the far end of the byre; the honey-rich flavour of kine mingled with the summer dusk within. The roan cow was more patient than usual, and Jose, feeling himself in consequence at liberty to take a little imaginative run, dropped his mumbled adjurations. His voice grew distinct and earnest as he commenced a spirited duologue, with one William Feather as second party, Jose acting as sponsor for William in that individual's absence.

"Now, William, I've getten a grand beäst for sale. What mud tha be after gieing?"

"Nay, I see nowt so mich i' her. Nay, I'm noan so set on naming a price."

"Lad, tha'rt daft, letting sich a chance go by. She gi'es sixteen quart a day, that she does—eight i' th' morn, an' eight at neet. She hesn't a bad trick wi' her, an' milks quiet as a lamb. Now, come, William; she's dirt cheap at twelve pun ten."

"Twelve pun ten, say'st 'a? What! for a ill-fettled beäst like yon? Fiddle o' that tale! I'll gie thee nine pun, an' mak thee shut on a bad bargain for old sake's sake."

"Nay, nay, I willun't tak a ha'penny less nor twelve pun. There's not another like her i' Ling Crag—nay, nor for twenty mile round, nawther. She's muck cheäp, I tell thee, at twelve pun. Only yestermorn Dick o' Rag war here, an' he tried to beät me down to eleven pun; but I warn't sich a softy, I warn't, an' I telled Dick he could tak her at twelve pun ten or lump it, just as it suited him. I'll mak it twelve, though, as it's thee, lad, an' that's more nor I'd do for Dick. He'll be back to-morn, likely, wi' th' brass i' his pocket; an' a sorry chap tha'll be, William, when tha sees thy bargain goan."

The argument went on briskly till Jose was nearly through with his last pair of udders; William had certainly the lesser half of the talking to do, but this was a pardonable human trait in old Binns. Finally, a compromise was effected at ten pounds, and Jose Binns got up from his stool. He smacked the roan cow's flanks, uttering the while a quiet cackle of delight.

"Tha girt lanky bitch," cried he, "tha artn't worth seven pun, let alone ten. Tha knows tha kicks th' pail ower ivery time ony but me shapes to milk thee, an' oftens then; tha ho'ds thy milk; tha's as full o' jade's tricks as a egg is full o' meät. Eh, lass! but William mun ha' bin doiting when he gie ten pun for thee."

"Is that my cow you're selling, Jose?" asked the preacher, from the doorway.

"Ay, I war doing part bargaining. I selled th' owd roän cow for ten pun. Eh, it war grand-—grand! He's noan what he war at a bargain, isn't William."

Gabriel laughed, as one accustomed to these visionary sales.

"I want the trap to-morrow. See that it's well cleaned—spick and span as you can make it."

"Isn't it allus well cleäned?" grumbled Jose, settling himself to the last of the cows.

"Well, yes; but this is a special occasion. Mr. Lomax comes home with his wife in the afternoon, and I'm going to meet them at Heathley. It isn't every day, Jose, I have to meet a honeymoon couple."

"Not *sich* a couple," said Jose, slowly.

"What do you mean, man? You look as sour as a winter apple over it."

"I've heärd tales as are like to set a man's back up. Oh, ay, there's been queer goings on up to Teewit House."

Partly from habit, partly from the spirit of the country, Gabriel was wont to humour old Binns; but he frowned to-night as Jose touched on matters about which he himself had been sorely exercised.

"Nonsense! I wonder at you, Jose, listening to such old woman's talk."

"Wondering won't shape things different, an' that's Bible truth. What for doesn't th' Manor trap wend to th' station, i' place o' yourn?"

"Because," said the preacher, with an accent there was no mistaking—"because I asked Mrs. Lomax to let me go and meet them. There are too many idle tongues about; but I fancy folks know I shouldn't run after wastrels—and it may be as well to show what I think at once, and have done with it."

"I doan't hold wi' kissing," muttered Jose, doggedly—"leastways, while thy wife's another chap's. Afore marriage, I allus did say, fowks ought to think shame to kiss an' slaver ower one another; an' after ye're wed—well, ye're noan so set on it, an' there's no harm done. Them's *my* views—gie ower, lass! Dost 'a want to upset th' pail, tha silly wench?"

The set of Jose's shoulders indicated that the subject was closed, so far as he was concerned; so Gabriel, with another reminder about the conveyance, went back to the house, there

to reckon up, for the hundredth time, the twisted ways of his friend's wooing.

But the May sun was shining bravely as he drove to Heathley at three of the following afternoon, and loyalty to Griff seemed just part and parcel of the quickening landscape. Step by step with the loyalty ran that unalterable egoism of the preacher's. If he could feel himself singled out, now for Divine wrath, now for commendation at the Deity's hands, how much easier was it for him to believe that Marshcotes and Ling Crag set great store by his example? They knew him, all these villagers who had been shaken by the scandal in their midst; they saw in him a resolute and a God-fearing man, one whose opinion on a point of morals was worth the having; how could it fail to make Griff's road the smoother for him if he, Gabriel Hirst, ostentatiously went forward to greet him on his arrival? Perhaps, then, it was almost a disappointment to Gabriel when he reached Heathley and discovered that certain daring minds had chosen to act on their own initiative. The good coach "Airedale" ran from Landford to Heathley in those days, and it had been noised abroad among those who knew Lomax that he and his wife would reach the Spotted Heifer at two of the afternoon. The preacher found the inn-yard black with chattering groups of Marshcotes folk, gathered from widely different sections of the community. Some had walked to Heathley, others had come by omnibus; all, by the look of their faces, were prepared to give young Lomax as hearty a greeting as he could wish for.

The same impulse which had moved the preacher to side with the weaker cause was not likely to leave unmoved others of these sturdy dwellers on the moors. The weak, the irresolute and the ultra-pious were dead against Griff and his wife; they forgot old likings, and remembered only what had been proved up to the hilt in a court of law. And this attitude had roused the more independent men and women; they brought to mind the fact that no one in Marshcotes had had a word to say against Griff until this trouble came; none could urge that the lad's treatment of Kate was simply a corollary of previous

conduct of his; but plenty of people were mindful of the open-handed way in which Griff and his mother had gone in and out among their neighbours. Before the trouble with Strangeways' wife, indeed, there had been a remarkable unanimity in the mind of the countryside as to the Lomaxes. Some were wont to style Griff "a raffle-coppin," meaning thereby a kind of ne'er-do-weel whom everybody loved; but that was the worst name you were likely to hear attached to him through the length and breadth of Marshcotes parish. And though they had their faults—these upland folk—forgetfulness of old friendships was not among their vices.

So the preacher, as he jumped from the trap and threw the reins to a boy who chanced to be near, felt as though a little cold water had been sprinkled over the fine warmth of his enthusiasm. He recommenced the searchings of soul, the anxious appeals to Providence as to whether he were doing the right thing, now that he stood as one of a band of well-wishers, not as a solitary ally against a crowd of backbiters.

But the waiting groups were unmistakably glad to see Gabriel Hirst come into the inn-yard. If they had failed to look to him for inspiration to perform a kindly act, they were at least deeply sensible of the sanction given to that act by the presence of one who was pre-eminently a man of God. Even Jack o' Ling Crag, with his satellites, Will Reddiough and the rest, warmed to the conviction "that Gabriel Hirst war noan sich a bad sort of a chap, when he left his praching-tackle behind him."

The coach was late, according to a precedent not unknown at Heathley; but no diminution of good spirits was apparent in the jolly crowd that thronged the yard. The demonstration had none of the dreary formality peculiar to organized gatherings. Each little handful of men and women had come here on its own account, expecting to be the sole representative of the village, and casting uneasy glances at its neighbours as it set off down the village street, lest its destination should be guessed and commented on; each little knot, on arriving at the inn, looked at the next group, first with surprise, then with

broadening grins. Every one—with the exception of the preacher—felt that it was pleasant to have company while arguing for the doubtful side of a moral question.

As for Jack o' Ling Crag, he was all a-bubble with suppressed glee. When Reddiough observed that there was a fine welcome in store for the travellers, Jack winked very knowingly, and, "Thee bide a bit," he answered darkly; "happen there's summat i' th' way on a extra surprise i' store."

At last the coach came in, with a mighty screech of the horn and a rattling of horses' hoofs on the cobbles. Gabriel Hirst sent his self-communing to the winds as he saw Griff —old Griff—standing on the top of the coach, his head somewhere up about the level of the Spotted Heifer's chimney-stacks, his face one comprehensive laugh of satisfaction. Three-times-three went up from the crowd, and old Jim, of cheery memory, gave a gallant blast from his horn, and a mixed collection of children, dogs, and loafers gathered round the outskirts of the throng, to see what all the fuss was about.

"I've brought the trap for you; we'll be at the Manor in no time, with the chestnut between the shafts," said the preacher, salutations over.

"Axing your pardon, sir," interrupted Jack o' Ling Crag, "th' chestnut isn't no longer atween th' shafts; there's shanks's mare i' place o' horseflesh, if so be as Mr. Lummax——"

"Here, I say!" broke in Griff, with a jolly laugh; "a joke's a joke, Jacky boy, but it's four good miles to Marshcotes Manor; you can't pull us all the way?"

"An' a home-coming's a home-coming, an' a welcome's a welcome," answered mine host of the Dog and Grouse; "an' what's four mile to Marshcotes lads? We'll tak turn an' turn about; there's plenty on us for that little journey."

"And there's a house-side called Marshcotes main street at the end of it. Have you thought of that, boys?" said Griff, still laughing.

"Tak what the Lord gi'es ye, sir, an' mak no bones about it. Up ye get, an' away we go; an' if we're as willing as your wife's bonny, ye won't be lang on th' roäd."

Jack o' Ling Crag, having exhausted himself in this effort of gallantry, ran forward and took his place at the left shaft of the conveyance. Kate was a little bewildered, and vastly pleased, by the unexpected symptoms of good-will; but her confusion did not signify in the least, since she was only expected to blush rosy red and look her best. They had cheered for Griff, and they had cheered for Kate, this crowd of hard uplanders, who could let themselves out for a holiday on occasion. So up went another three-times-three for the "little pracher," and Gabriel found himself swung by mighty arms on to the back seat of the trap. Jack was joined by five other stalwart volunteers, and away they rattled through the market-place, along the rutty, narrow streets, and so into the smooth highway that led to Marshcotes. All who had come on foot kept pace beside the gig; a little behind followed the green omnibus from the Bull, and the red 'bus from the White Hart just across the way.

At the foot of Marshcotes main street was the surprise which old poacher Jack's innocent heart had devised, as likely to give his comrade about as much pleasure as a man could hold without unduly stretching his anatomy. The local band struck up its own private version of the wedding-march, and headed the triumphal procession with a vigour that was unimpeachable.

"Now, sir, hes Marshcotes gi'en ye a welcome, or hesn't it?" demanded Jack, relinquishing his post at the shaft and going to Griff's side.

"It has that! We'll not forget to-day, Kate, will we?"

"Durn it, it's nowt so mich to crack on—on'y we thowt as we'd just try our best, Mr. Lummax," muttered Jack, and dropped modestly to the rear of the procession.

Mrs. Lomax was at the Manor gate when they arrived. She had heard the shouting, and a tune that seemed vaguely connected with wedding festivals, and the clatter of clogs on the stones; but she could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw the fashion of Griff's home-coming, nor her ears when she heard the shouts of good fellowship. The old lady's eyes

dimmed with tears; it was good to believe in such friendliness as had prompted these rackety demonstrations.

Much would have more, and up went three cheers for the mother. Griff helped Kate down, kissed his mother, and turned to the crowd.

"We can't entertain you all here," he laughed, "but come in, as many as can squeeze a way."

"An' them as can't, will find quarters at th' Dog an' Grouse!" cried Jack o' Ling Crag.

"An' th' Bull can mak room for a two or three," chimed in the rival landlord.

After the noisy crowd had been got rid of, they had supper, the three of them; and after that Griff lit his pipe, and stretched out his long legs to the blaze, and looked from the mother on one side of the hearth to the wife on the other—wondering the while that this vexed problem of marriage worked itself out so exceeding smoothly in practice.

It seemed odd to Kate to find herself once again in that firelit parlour, where she had waited till Griff might return to claim her, where she had sickened with dread lest an ever-watchful Providence should snatch the coming happiness from her grasp. She had forgotten, in the midst of her dread, that it is only the things we fear most abjectly which never happen; keen terror would seem to act as a buffer between its object and its fulfilment, but she had not stopped to think of that. And now she was here, with Griff beside her—with an earnest, too, from those she had known, her life through, that they were minded to esteem her a woman of honour. Impulsively she put her arms round Griff's neck and drew his face down.

"I had never dreamed such things could be," she whispered.

The honeymoon had left her with her illusions sweet and sound. She was no girl, to be outraged by necessities, to quiver under the little jars that make up the wear and tear of a privacy shared with another. Her idols were a woman's; her hopes of the new life were of tougher fabric than the girl's peach-bloom romanticism, to be rubbed bare by any passing sleeve; and those two months they had had together, she and

Griff, had given her no cause to doubt the future. Whether the Providence she held in superstitious dread had chosen prose instead of poetry, had elected to rob her, hour by weary hour after she had once settled into her new life, of the happiness that now almost hurt her by its intensity—whether Providence thought surfeit a subtler cruelty than the mere dashing away of an untasted cup, remained to be seen—but Kate's dreads did not lie that way, and her home-coming had not a drop of bitter in among the sweets.

The mother's keen eyes took stock of them both, and the doubt in her face resolved itself slowly as she watched. Like all homely women, she had a quick scent for harmony or discord between married people, and she felt that Kate and Griff were "all right."

"Well, mother?" said Griff, when Kate had left them.

"That is a big question to ask, dear, is it not? But you will do, I fancy, the pair of you. I have been anxious, terribly anxious, about the effect these eight weeks would have on you. You went away gaily enough, boy, but *I* knew that it was kill or cure."

"What do you mean, quite?"

"You would not have asked me that if the experiment had gone wrong. Suppose you had made a mistake, Griff? Considering your impulsiveness, it is the least one could have expected of you—to make a mistake. Don't you think two months in each other's company, with no one to fill up the gaps, would have made the truth clear to you?"

"If you knew Kate as I do, mother," said the son, with a ridiculous air of possession, "you would see there *could* have been no mistake."

"Very proper, dear. You sound just like a lover, and I wouldn't be in any hurry, if I were you, to become a mere husband. Your father always forgot, to the end of the chapter, that we hadn't tumbled into love with each other the day before."

CHAPTER XVI.

RODDICK'S WIFE.

"WELL?" demanded Roddick, as Griff thrust his head in at the open window of the Wynyates parlour. "How does marriage go?"

"Like the weather, old man; soft, variable winds, no showers to speak of, and a touch of green showing everywhere."

"Come in, can't you? Why do you stand there with that perennial grin on your face, as if you were posing for a full-length portrait of the happy bridegroom? Away with you newly-married people!"

"Thanks," said Griff, striding over the low window-sill.

"You think the whole world must be looking through your rose-tinted spectacles. Wait till the glass gets smoked, and walk delicately in the meanwhile; you're not a degree higher than a cat on a glass-bottled wall, and if you go prancing along in this style——"

"You are in very good form this morning, Roddick. It does a man good to listen to your breadth of epithet."

"Breadth of epithet! Why talk like a book, Lomax? Call them swears, and have done with it. What have you come for?"

"To be congratulated. I couldn't miss your pretty way of putting things, so here I am, the very morning after my return."

"I suspect you want comfort," snarled Roddick. "I can give you that. There's a heap of fools in the same box with you, so you won't run a chance of feeling lonely. About how soon do you think of bolting for good and all?"

"Roddick, you're going a bit too far——" began Griff, hotly. But he caught a wicked light of satisfaction in the other's face, and made up his mind that he would not be guyed—"trailed," as they called it in Marshcotes—however much the amusement might give Roddick a vent for his ill-humour.

"I mostly am. Once I went very much too far, and—have some tobacco."

They smoked on in silence for awhile. Griff ventured a remark at length; his companion took no notice whatever, but went on frowning at the live peats in the grate.

"About that woman," said Roddick, finally.

"Which woman?"

"The thing you mistook for a vampire when you were last here. What did the pretty little beast do to you, Lomax, out there in the darkness?"

Griff shuddered; he had almost forgotten the incident under stress of the quick march of later events.

"She leaped out of the wind and rain like a storm-elf, and glued her flabby lips to mine, and called me 'Leo.'"

"Only that? You'd get used to it with practice," said Roddick, with a grim caricature of cheeriness; "one does to anything. Leo happens to be my own name, if you remember. On my soul, Lomax, I'm jealous! You've stolen one of the kisses that are my exclusive property. Gad, I've a mind to horsewhip you!"

Roddick was swung by passion into the very worst of his moods. All through this bitter levity ran a streak of blasphemy—a silent, strenuous blasphemy that was worse than any red-hot flow of words could have been.

"But who is she?" said his companion, gravely.

"Who is she?" Roddick's laugh burst out as if it had been half-strangled on its way to his mouth. "Innocent friend, who is a woman usually that prowls round one's doorway in the dark, and leaps into one's arms, and—the rest of it? The woman is my wife, of course."

Another dead silence. The first of the summer's bees forsook the white arabis that was coming into blossom under

the parlour window, and flew into the room. Roddick watched it as it buzzed from wall to wall; then it wanted to escape, and made a dive for the upper window, banging itself against the glass.

"It's fun getting in, but how are you going to get out again, little fool?" muttered Roddick. He went to the window and squashed the bee flat against the glass; then returned to his place. "Lomax," he said quietly, "you'd better hear all about it; half a true story is worse than a whole lie. You want to know how this Venus became my cherished wife?"

"Oh, drop that tone, old man!" cried Griff. "You don't mean it, and it grinds at one's nerves horribly. Is she really your wife? From what I could see of her in the dark, she seemed too old—any age she might have been——"

"She's forty-five, as you are rude enough to call a lady's age in question," said Roddick, still in the same voice. "Drink has delicate fingers, you know, for modelling a woman's face, and she looks older. As to her being my wife, there is no question: she carries her marriage-lines like a talisman next to her breast. She brought the paper out, only a day or two ago, and asked me to gloat over it with her in Darby and Joan fashion; but you can understand that I find it rather difficult nowadays to play the *rôle* of dutiful husband."

Griff had abandoned thought of interruption. It was frightful to listen to the man's cold-blooded rendering of his tragedy, but Roddick must tell his story in his own way, or not at all.

"We'll begin with the idyllic stage, Lomax, as you've rather a taste for sweetmeats. When I was twenty, and charmingly innocent, I went for a week's fishing in Devonshire. I put up at a little inn, a hundred miles from anywhere, and the landlord's daughter—who was scarcely innocent, I believe, at the moment she was born—took me in hand. You know what that means, when a young cub just let loose from school is flattered and fawned on by a woman five years his senior. The girl was passably pretty, too. Well, I came down again to the

inn a few months later, and I was greeted with news—news, and tears, and entreaties from the girl that I would marry her. I was soft in those days—tender, you know—and I did marry her, more out of pity than anything else. I have never been tender since," he added, with a sudden deepening of his voice.

"Then—you were married all the five years we knew each other in town? Did Dereham, or any others of our set, know about it?"

"No, though I nearly blurted it out more than once, when they came to me with their doll's-house prettinesses about women. *You* thought you were a cynic, now and then, didn't you, Lomax, when the Ogilvie woman touched you up a bit too hard? Lord, I could have taught you a cynicism that grips your vitals! You'll never learn it now, so it's lucky you've struck into optimism—it fits you better."

"Never mind me, Roddick. Finish your story."

"Six months after I married my picturesque maid of the inn—the child died a day or two after its birth—she began to take opium for sleeplessness; she continued it as a luxury. From that she passed, with true catholicity, to wine, brandy, whisky—or, failing these, gin. She grew more beast-like every year, till now it's only the clothes and the walking on her hind legs that stamp her as a woman. Three times she has tried to kill me, and once—my cursed conscience won't let me do anything else—I have saved her from death."

"I thought you disclaimed tenderness just now," put in Griff, scarce knowing what to say. "In your place, I should have let her die."

"You wouldn't, when it came to the point," snapped Roddick. "We've most of us been murderers in theory, but it rings differently when it comes to practice. Not that tenderness has anything to do with it. I loathe her, and wish she were dead: it's my fool of a conscience, I tell you, that ought to have perished of *ennui* years ago. But neither will die; they're tough as nails, both the wife and the conscience. Wherever I go, I take the woman with me, like a monkey in a cage, with a

nurse to look after her. When I lived in town, I planted my menagerie down in Hampstead; when I came here, I put her in a cottage as far in the heart of the moor as I could manage —she's there at this moment, unless she has given her nurse the slip again and come in search of me."

"And you see her often?"

"I have to," said Roddick, with bitter weariness; "sometimes it takes a strong pairs of arms to hold her. But her tantrums are the part of our married life I find the easiest to bear. She is not always mad, you know. She only tries to throttle me in and between whiles, by way of variety; at other times she loves me dearly, she fawns on me, she—— Never mind, Lomax; it makes me sick to talk of it."

"Poor old chap—poor old chap!" muttered Griff, vaguely. "Why the devil can't she die? A year or two of such a life would finish off any ordinary woman."

"Don't repeat that!" cried Roddick, sharply. "The next step is, what a fool I am not to kill her, and I kick ideas of that kind out of my mind before they get a chance."

"Roddick," said Griff—with a sudden glimpse of the reason that had brought his friend to this out-of-the-way moor—"Roddick, have you told me all?"

The other was silent for a space. His brows came together, overhanging his deep-sunken eyes like a jagged thatch.

"No, it is not all. When I said I had shelved tenderness, I lied. Dereham learned that end of my story, because he happened to know the girl's people."

Griff bethought him of Frender's Folly—of the coincidence between the coming of Laverack and the letting of Wynyates Hall—of the hint that Gabriel Hirst had once given him as to the distress of Laverack's daughter.

"The Laveracks, you mean?" he said bluntly.

"How did you guess that?"

"I remembered that you and they turned up almost together, that was all."

"Well, it doesn't signify, I suppose. You're not the man to gabble, are you, Lomax? I used to wonder at what you

artistic people call illicit passions; close upon forty, with a wife who had taught me my lesson, it never occurred to me that I should be bothered by love. But Dereham took me one afternoon to the Laveracks'; why I went with him, the Lord only knows, hating tea-cup frippery as I did. Anyhow, I went, and Janet was there; you can piece the beginning together for yourself. The thing was as inevitable, Lomax, as thunder after lightning; we had been waiting all our lives for each other, and—there I go, slipping into the old, weather-beaten tags. A man can't touch love with words, any more than he can describe a sunrise."

"Did you strive against it?" The question was out and away before Griff could capture it. He was curious to know how a man of Roddick's stamp would behave under such an unexpected stress.

"Strive? No, you fool! It's the half-way people who flutter and beat their wings against the cage. A man either cuts the whole thing at once, or yields unconditionally. I yielded. Then Laverack got wind of it, and took the Folly in a hurry, and carried off Janet to the moors here."

Roddick got up from his chair, and began to pace about the room.

"Old man," he cried suddenly, "thank your God you have never had that to fight against—to live chained to a woman you loathe, and to know that a word will give you the love you crave for. And sometimes"—his voice sank to a whisper—"sometimes my little lady, in her innocence and passion, entreats me to take her away somewhere, and end it all. Then, Lomax, it is just hell."

Griff was driven to bay, as we all are when our friends force us to be helpless spectators of their distress.

"Do you remember the advice you once gave me—to cut and run, and snatch happiness while I could? A man, you say, doesn't beat his wings against the cage—but you are doing it," he said, impotently.

Roddick turned and blazed out on him.

"Do you know what that would mean for Janet? Do you

know that I'd pawn my beggarly soul to save her little finger an ache?"

"Can't you get a divorce?" said Griff, breaking a long silence.

"No valid excuse, or shouldn't I have jumped at it? A woman may drink one's good name away and attempt one's life, and be faithful for all that. Drink comes under the sickness or health, richer or poorer, clause."

Griff also rose from his chair and fidgeted nervously up and down the floor.

"I'm off, Roddick," he said at last. "God help you, old fellow!"

Roddick grinned.

"I used to say that, but I had less experience then. You're not going to leave me yet. I'll saddle the grey, and we must have a gallop together. There's nothing like a horse for driving sanity into a man."

But all along the road, gallop, canter, or trot, Griff could not rid himself of the burden—

"If only the woman would die; if only the woman would die."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH MRS. LOMAX GROWS ANGRY.

THEY had been at the Manor for a week, Kate and he, before it seriously occurred to Griff that they could not go on living here for ever. Mrs. Lomax had been very urgent, more than once since his return, that they should make the Manor their home; but Griff knew his mother too well to dream for a moment that she could endure a second mistress in the house. Kate was as strong and unbending in some ways as the older woman, and the position was sure to be productive, in the long run, of jar and discomfort.

So Griff went for a long walk one afternoon, in order to think out what was best to be done. To tell his mother straightforwardly that it was time he sought a house elsewhere seemed likely to result in a quarrel between them; and he shirked the idea of that more instinctively than he shrank from the thought of letting their lives drift into a state of perpetual, half-felt friction. At the end of his walk he was no nearer to a solution of the difficulty than when he started, and he turned into the Bull, not feeling over anxious to meet his women-folk while he was still in this pitiable state of doubt.

"You're looking bothered, like, Mr. Lummax," said the landlord, bustling in to serve his favourite customer.

"I *am* bothered, Crabtree. Give me a Scotch whisky, and we'll see if that will help me."

Crabtree loitered about, as his habit was, after bringing the whisky. He finally came to rest against the window, pointing his meditations by an up-and-down motion of the straw between his teeth.

"Well, how's the world?" asked Griff.

"Nobbut sadly, sir, nobbut sadly. They tell us it's th' best world we've getten, but I niver did see how that helped a body. What wi' th' sheep lambing too forrard-like i' th' spring, an' th' frost taking half th' lambkins off, an' th' rain when I should hev been leäding my hay, an' th' drought when th' tummits wanted watter, an' th' wife slipping away under-sod fair at t' thrangest time she could ha' chosen—nay, it's a poor mak on a world, tak it how ye will. Thank ye, Mr. Lummax, I will hev a fill; baccy an' strong drink is all as us poor men can look to for comfort."

"You're a fine hand at the grumbles, Crabtree. I warrant you've turned over a tidy penny this year, for all your growls. As to your wife, you've soon found another, eh?"

There was the faintest trace of a smile at that corner of the landlord's mouth which was not occupied by the straw; but the rest of his face was expressive of sad rebuke.

"It's easy to jest, sir, when ye've getten the lump of your troubles afore ye. She war a grand lass, th' first 'un, an' niver a wrang word between us, save when it jumped out accidental-like. But what can a feckless man do wi' a public on his hands, an' none to see to th' sarving-maid, an' th' washing, an' th' cooking? I've nowt agen t' other missuses, ye'll understand, but they're more, as a man might say, i' th' way o' meät an' drink—a thing 'at cannot be done without. But th' first wife—it war more i' th' way of a pleasure, like, nor a business, my marrying her. Well, well, it's up an' it's down i' this life, an' afore ye've rightly getten used to one position, ye're shifted to t' other. My head fair swims, whiles, when I fall to thinking o' th' whirligig."

Griff's eyes had wandered from his host to the half-dozen bills of sale that lined the opposite wall.

"I say, Crabtree!" he interrupted; "I didn't know Gorsthwaite Hall was for sale. Have you noticed that bill up there—the middle one?"

"I can't say as I hev, sir. They come an' they go, does farms—like wives, in a manner o' speaking—an' a man gets ower used to th' shiftings to pay much heed to 'em."

Crabtree moved to the printed sheet and slowly read out the contents.

"Mr. Crowther Crowther is honoured, by the executors of the late Thomas Widdop, with instructions to sell that valuable freehold property known as Gorsthwaite Hall, with all the farm buildings, implements, live and dead stock, as under." Then followed a list of horses, heifers, cows in calf, waggons, turnip and hay choppers, and the like; and an exposition of the agricultural merits of the "Three closes of land adjoining thereto, comprising in all about thirty acres."

"A fine old place it is, too," said Griff, thoughtfully.

"It's like a sight of other fine old places hereabouts, sir—gone to wrack an' ruin. Ay, I mind th' time when there war more Widdops at Gorsthet nor old Thomas: he war nobbut a young 'un' then, an' I war nobbut a young 'un, an' there war three as bonny lasses—sisters o' Thomas's—as ever stepped i' shoe leather used to cross th' Gorsthet doorstuns day in an' day out. But they're all owered wi', is th' Widdops, an' I misdoubt th' owd spot will be selled, so to say, for th' price of a pint."

"There's no telling. Well, Crabtree, your whisky has set me up again, and I think it's about time I was off."

"Afore ye go, sir, there's a bit of a matter I wanted to tell ye on. Happen ye've forgetten Joe Strangeways?"

Griff perceptibly changed colour.

"Not likely," he said brusquely.

"Meaning no offence, Mr. Lummax—me that hes known ye, man an' boy, these thirty year. But he's getting forrarder i' drink, is Joe, an' there comes a time when drink 'ull mak th' softest mammy's lad i' th' land shape courageous-like. He's a wind-bag, says t' others; but I've getten my own notions about that, an' he swears at ye summat fearful, sir, nowadays—says he'll hev your life; an' a mak o' foul-mouthed words he's getten to say it in. I'd advise ye to hev a care, an' that's what I set out to tell ye, sir."

"It's good of you to bother, Crabtree—but you can trust me to look after myself. Good day."

"Short an' sharp, as th' gentry allus is when their women-

folk is in case. Nay, nay, they're kittle cattle, is women, an' kittle they mak their men; an' I *should* hev a right to know," muttered Crabtree, as he strolled into the kitchen to watch the fourth of his wives rolling out the dough for a gooseberry-pasty.

Griff went straight back to the Manor, his good spirits restored now that he had made up his mind how to act. But he said nothing of his resolve, and merely told his mother, when mare Lassie and he set off after breakfast the next morning, that he had to go to Saxilton on business. His destination was a certain office, half-way up the narrow main street of Saxilton, which had been given at the bottom of the poster as the address of the trustees of the late Thomas Widdop's estate. Griff, though he knew there was a reckoning in store for him, felt something of a lad's blithe glee in truantry as he rode down the trough of the valley, and up the other side, and down again till he came to the wood-road that lies between Saxilton and Plover Court, where old Squire Daneholme lived. The air was moist and kindly, and the young green things were sprouting up through the withered leaves of the under-brush: cock-pheasants were exhibiting their charms to admiring wives in many a glade of the open park-land that divided the woods here and there; weasels and stoats kept peeping at him from clefts in the mossy walls, and squirrels lay flat along their tree-branches at his approach, in a well-feigned stiffness that was suggestive of death. Griff laughed as he passed the sweep of sandy carriage-drive that struck up the hill to Plover Court.

"You gave me a merry time not long since, Squire. Shall I take you at your word, and drop in to dinner to-night?" he thought.

And no sooner had he turned the corner where the highway runs over the river-bridge and past the corn-mill, than whom should he meet but the bluff old Squire himself, coming cantering home on a chestnut thoroughbred. Griff saluted him merrily with his whip at his cap, and the Squire pulled up.

"You're young Lomax, aren't you? We've met before, I fancy."

"We have. I hope you were no worse, sir, for the meeting?"

"Worse for it? No, you young sinner; it did me good, after my jaws unstiffened enough to let me eat. Your face was scratched a bit, by the way, wasn't it?"

They laughed heartily at that, the Squire's chestnut fidgeting all the while as if he thought to take his master unawares at last. Old Daneholme swore most pleasantly at the brute, and then looked Griff up and down.

"You've a pretty seat on horseback, lad. I like to look at a figure like yours, in these damned round-shouldered, narrow-chested times. If you had seen all the changes for the worse in the race that I have, you'd be sorry that you were not born when I was—a generation sooner. Well, are you coming home with me to lunch?"

"Not to-day, I'm afraid. I have business to attend to in Saxilton, and after that I must put my best foot forward to Marshcotes."

"Ah, yes! I remember now—something in the papers—you're married, eh?"

"Yes. Just what did you see in the papers, Mr. Daneholme?" said Griff, with a sudden flush.

"Something about a divorce, and then a notice that you were married. Humph! A riskier enterprise, marriage, than poaching an old fool's game."

Griff thought that the poaching of game was merely a simile, and he resented the innuendo. If he had known the Squire better, he would not have credited him with any such beating about the bush.

"The divorce came through no fault of ours, sir; the story was a trumped-up lie," said he, hotly.

Roger Daneholme opened his mouth for a guffaw that showed his splendid double row of teeth, scarce one of which was a whit the worse for wear.

"What do I care about that, eh?" said he, good-humouredly. "Bless me, a young man must love, or he's no man at all. But marriage—it's risky. So you'll take Plover on your way back, will you?"

There was no resisting the cheery, persistent hospitality of

the man, and Griff gave in. He could well believe now that the Marshcotes folk had spoken a true word when they said that the Squire was a devil to those he hated, and the best of good fellows to any who happened to take his fancy.

The stocks and the old market-place have gone from Saxilton main street now, but in those days they fronted the lawyer's office of which Griff had come in search. After saying good-bye to the Squire, he cantered up the narrow street, hitched Lassie's bridle to a ring at the end of the stocks, and went inside to get through his business with what expedition he might, since they lunched sharp at one at Plover. Gorsthwaite Hall, as Crabtree of the Bull had prophesied, was to be had for a song; the lawyers were only too glad to get rid of it at a trifle over the price which Griff first named, and the place was his in a very short space of time. Then, his business settled, he set off for Plover Court, and reached it within five minutes of the luncheon hour.

It was lucky that Griff had a good head for liquor; for the Squire kept him drinking long after Mrs. Daneholme had left the table, with the avowed intention of seeing which was the better man at the bottle.

"You worsted me with your fists, you puppy—not that you would find it easy to do as much a second time—but I'm hanged if I haven't the stronger head for port."

"We can only decide that in one way," laughed Griff, who was always quick to take up a challenge.

They cracked a second bottle, and a third, the Squire chatting ceaselessly of this and that harum-scarum adventure in which he had taken part—when he was younger, he never failed to add. And the longer Griff listened, the better he liked the man's healthy energy. Old Daneholme had no conscience whatever, save on certain points where a rough-and-tumble honesty was concerned. By his own showing, he had indulged in some rough vices, and even generosity he carried recklessly past the point where it ceased to be a virtue. Yet, with it all, there was a fresh, inborn strenuousness about old Roger; he never stopped to ask himself if he were good or bad—could not

have been certain, indeed, what so absurd a question implied—but just took life at a gallop, over hedge and ditch, and enjoyed such frolic as Heaven sent in his way. There was a vein of sound humour in him, too,—a trifle rough and biting to the taste, may be, but sound for all that—and his fine grey eyes looked out at you with a twinkle which said, as plainly as possible, that he cared not one button for your opinion. A man of the true old Yorkshire breed.

"Get on to your legs, my boy," said the Squire, when they were half through with the fourth bottle.

Griff complied with the request, and stood looking down at his host with humorous gravity. Then he went the length of the room and back again, with the action of a horse being put through its paces. Finally, he resumed his seat, with a—

"Can you do as much, sir?"

"Can I do as much?" roared the Squire. "Confound your impertinence, sir! I'm scarcely warmed with the wine as yet. Gad, though, you don't turn a hair! I wish that son of mine had been at home to see you; it would have knocked some of the conceit out of him. He can't touch me, Lomax, not if I give him one bottle handicap. Come, drink up!"

He went over to the bell and put his hand on the rope. Not for a fortune would Griff have suggested that they had drunk enough, though he could see only one end to the adventure—and that a most annoying one, with Kate awaiting his return. But the Squire thought better of it, and flashed round on his guest with merry boisterousness.

"Well, well, I'll let you off another bottle. You are young in marriage yet, and your wife might not altogether like it if you turned up happily drunk. Women are such fools about these matters."

When Griff succeeded at last in making his escape, Squire Daneholme walked with him down the drive as far as the Saxilton highroad. There was a faint tinge of regret in his tone as he held out his hand to his guest.

"I thought the fresh air might help a bit, Lomax. But you're as steady as a rock, confound you! You must come

again when marriage wears thin, and we'll make a night of it. Bless you, boy, I have not taken to any one for years as I have to you."

Griff, laughing off the compliment, sprang into the saddle.

"Stay, lad!" shouted the Squire, as Lassie was breaking into a trot. "A piece of parting advice. Ride straight, drink level, never repent of your sins, and die as I find you—a jolly good fellow. Good-bye."

Late that evening, when Kate had left him alone with the mother, Griff summoned up all his courage and blurted out what had been the trend of his morning's business.

"I have bought Gorsthwaite Hall, mother."

She looked up sharply at him.

"So it has come at last, Griff? I feared it would, some day—but scarcely as soon as this."

"Now, old lady, don't be foolish about it. Do you want it to be said that I beat you in the matter of common sense? Kate and I must leave you sooner or later."

She fell into an obstinate silence, her face averted from her son's; it seemed as if she heard nothing of his fragmentary explanations. Then, at last—

"It is I who ought to leave. The Manor is yours, not mine."

"Mother, how can you!" He knelt at her feet, and took her hands, and tried to force her eyes to meet his.

But she would neither look at him nor suffer his endearments.

"Get up, Griff, and leave me alone. I don't want to hear any more excuses."

There was such a peremptory sharpness in her voice that Griff had no choice but to obey. The quarrel had come, but he had not dreamed that his mother would have taken it as badly as this.

The fire had burnt very low when he next ventured into the room. The old lady was still in the same attitude.

"Mother," whispered Griff.

She made no answer for awhile; then the tears ran slowly

down her cheeks—those scanty tears of the old, which are so much bitterer, so much more heavily laden, at the end of a lifetime's disappointments.

"It is time I went, Griff. You are tired of the old woman, you and Kate."

Then there followed such a storm of lover-like protestations, such a fondling of the wrinkled face and hands, that these two might never have been mother and son at all, but just a pair of newly-married youngsters getting through the business of their first quarrel. And Griff vowed, at the end of it all, that nothing would induce him to leave the Manor, since the dearest old lady in the world wanted him to stay. Whereupon the mother got up from her chair, wiped her eyes, smoothed out the rumples in her dress, and put twice as much asperity as usual into her voice.

"Now you are ridiculous, Griff. Dear, dear; here have I been wasting my time in crying—it was only a tear or two, though, was it?—when I should have been supplying you with wits. Stay on at the Manor, when you have bought Gorsthwaite? Waste your money, and let the house drop to pieces for want of looking after? Boy, where *is* your common sense?"

And that was how Griff came to take his wife to Gorsthwaite Hall.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CUTTING OF PEATS.

The Marshcotes Moor was bounded, on the side remote from the village, by a broad stretch of "intake"—sparsely covered grass land, wrested from the heath by long years of sweat and perseverance. Beyond this again was an undulating valley, scarcely more than a dip in the moor plateau, which was full of rushes and swampy tracts, with here and there a bog. Above this valley lay Gorsthwaite Moor, where ling and bilberry-plants had less of their own way than on the Marshcotes side; great patches of gorse dotted the moor, and the sun never rose, summer or winter, without finding at least a few outstanding spots of yellow on which to shine.

At one corner of this moor, some two miles away from Marshcotes village, stood Gorsthwaite Hall, a fine specimen of the grim architecture in which the old moor squires delighted. The rectangular windows peered out at you, watchful and cold, from under their rugged brows of blackened sandstone. The door, plainly fashioned and massive, seemed to grudge the wonted breadth of entry, though its narrowness was more in appearance than in fact. The round-topped walls that guarded its paved courtyard harboured few of the kindly green sorts of mosses, but they were friends with bleak, grey lichens. The very chimney-stacks looked stiff and unbending, as if they had little to do with the roof that supported them; and the water-butt under the eaves, with its round black belly, was suggestive, in some vague, elusive way, of tragedies half-forgotten.

Yet Griff and his wife were as merry as the old house was sad. The spring had come and gone, and summer had run well

on into August, and still they would hug themselves, these two, in the thought of their isolation. There were a couple of attics at the top of the house, well-lighted from the roof, which Griff had knocked into one room and fitted up as a studio. The itch for painting had taken hold of him with more than its old-time vigour, and the one perpetual ground of disagreement between Kate and himself was the fact that he would insist on making some fresh sketch of his wife's face every other day or so.

"What do you find to talk about all your time?" Roddick had snarled one day.

"We live; we don't talk much about it," Griff had assured him, with a laugh that was entirely one of satisfaction.

That was just it. He had known wittier women than Kate, and some that were more beautiful in their own way; but Kate —well, she rounded off his life for him, and there was an end of it.

Mrs. Lomax, who often ran across from the Manor to spend a night or two with them, was speedily convinced that Griff's foolhardy experiment had proved a success. Now and then, indeed, she would throw out tentative warnings to "the children," a suggestion that they should see more people, or a doubt lest presently they might find themselves suffering from an overdose of a very good thing; and to all these hints Griff always made the same response—that they would fly in search of outside help directly the first symptoms of weariness set in.

But the Marshcotes doctor, who had grown grey in friendship with the Lomaxes, used to shake his head when he came away from his periodical visits to Kate. It was no use bothering Griff about it—or, at least, he could find no heart to do it—but not all Kate's brightness of spirits served to hide that underlying weakness of hers from the old man's eyes. Sometimes, as he recrossed the moor to Marshcotes, he would swear softly to himself, in a way ill-befitting the whiteness of his hair, and would murmur that it was a damned shame young Lomax had not come into Kate's life in time to save her.

Griff, when he was not at work, or at play, with his wife, was

generally to be found somewhere about the farm. There had been a farm attached to the Manor for many years after his father's death, and he had picked up a good deal of practical knowledge as a lad, which Simeon, his farm-man at Gorsthwaite, helped him to furbish up from day to day. Simeon distrusted his master's interference in these matters, as being "one what nobbut laked at wark," but he was bound to admit, underneath all his sneers, that Griff must have been to the manner born, so kindly did he take to the details of his education.

It was in the middle of August that Lomax, taking a short cut home one morning, discovered a pleasing fact in connection with Gorsthwaite Moor. The moor folk know well enough that gorse never grows on a peaty soil, and few of them guessed that Gorsthwaite, for all its splashes of yellow bloom, had a rich peat-bed on the side away from Marshcotes. Griff, chancing this morning to have his eyes on the bilberry clumps, to see if the second crop of berries would be worth the gathering, saw a rusty spade on the ground in front of him—a long, narrow spade, turned over at the right-hand side perpendicularly to the main face. A little further some crumbling peats were scattered on the top of a reddish-brown gash in the cheek of the moor.

"Simeon," said he to his farm-man, directly he got home, "there's peat to be had for the asking a mile away. Why should I go on paying for the stuff they bring from Cranshaw Moor?"

"It's noan o' th' best, isn't th' Cranshaw peät, but I niver heärd tell on there being peäts just hereabouts. Besides, it's ower late i' th' year to dry 'em now."

"We'll see about that. The time of year doesn't matter a button, so long as there is sun enough to dry them. Our stack is not big enough, I fancy, to last us through the winter."

Simeon growled. Your upland labourer is a terrible radical in respect of persons, but hopelessly conservative whenever farming operations are in question.

"Cut peäts i' August? Ye mud as weel mak hay at Kersmas: th' back-end o' May, or th' for-end o' June—that's

when Simeon Hey leärned to cut an' dry an' stack 'em ; nay, ye cannot get ower what is, an' is to be."

"Can't I? Just go and hunt up a spade, Simeon; I saw one in the lathe not long ago—back of the turnip-chopper, if I remember rightly. We'll go this afternoon."

Mid-day dinner over, Simeon slouched along at his master's heels, like a dog that is loth to accompany an indifferent sportsman. Griff took the spade and set to work at the peat-bed. First, he removed a few inches of the top layer of heather stumps and bilberry roots; then he drove the blade straight down, prized out the sod, and so moved along the whole line from left to right, the upturned perpendicular edge and flat back of the spade shaping clean faces to the peats.

"Ye may know nowt about th' time to cut, but ye frame weel at th' cutting," muttered Simeon, with grudging praise, as he picked up the falling peats and spread them out on the heather.

"And the sun will frame well at the drying, if the sweat of my body just now is anything to go by. Why, man, you don't often get a dry heat like this in June."

"Well, I'm noan saying th' peats willun't dry. What I says is, it isn't nat'ral; an', dry 'em or no, there'll no gooid come on 't. They willun't burn like good Chirstian peäts what's been led i' June."

But Griff only laughed, and shed his waistcoat, and went on with the cutting. The crack-crack of guns came to their ears from over Cranshaw way.

"Part shooiting about," dropped Simeon.

"Yes, that must be some of the Frender's Folly party. How far does Captain Laverack's shooting come, Simeon?"

"Fair across to a mile this side o' Wynyates. He's by way o' heving us know he's a tip-topper, is th' Captain; so he mun needs tak Gorsthet Moor, an' a slice out o' Ling Crag Moor, too, as if his own waren't big enow for fifty sich. *Sport?* Ay, he knows a sight about sport, does yon. I seed him ower this way a two or three day back, an' I fair laughed to see th' legs on him—as thin as a bog-reed, wi' a smattering o' striped

stocking ower 'em to keep th' wind fro' bending 'em double-ways."

Griff leaned on his spade, and laughed as he watched Simeon's dispassioned face.

"But he doesn't shoot with his legs. Come now, he may be a decent shot, for all that."

"What, driving th' birds an' sich? Nay, there's no mak o' sport i' driving. He mud as weel sit i' his own back parlour, an' hev th' grouse driven in at th' door. I reckon nowt o' your new-fangled, snipper-legged sporting chaps."

Griff's trust in the weather seemed likely to be justified. In a very few days the peats were dry enough to be set up on end, two and two, one leaning against the other in the form of an upturned V; and, as Simeon had to go to Saxilton to buy six head of cattle, the master saw to the work in person. August was more than half through, but there was no diminution of the heat. Griff had again doffed coat and waistcoat alike; the sleeves of his coarse woollen shirt were rolled up to the shoulder, and a broad leather strap held up his corduroy trousers. He had his back to a man who was approaching him, with a gun under his arm and a dog at his heels; the first Griff heard of his approach was a thin, querulous shout.

"Here, I say, my man. Damn it all!" piped the voice.

Griff arranged his couple of peats to his satisfaction, and turned slowly round.

"I beg your pardon?" he observed. Then he smiled, rather broadly, as he saw the legs of the spokesman, and thought of Simeon's version of the reed shaken with the wind.

"I said, *damn it all!*"

"Not a particularly original remark, but I don't see why you shouldn't make it. Is that all, sir?" Griff knew, quite as well as his assailant, what was amiss, but he had no intention of relinquishing his peats.

"All, all? No, it is not all. What are you doing on my moor? What do you mean by digging here while the shooting season is on? No wonder we've had poor sport this morning,

with you here to frighten every bird for a mile round. Didn't you hear our shots?"

Another figure appeared on the crest of the rise some two hundred yards away, and moved towards them.

"I believe I did, but they seemed a good distance off, and I was too busy to trouble. It is a serious matter, you see, to be short of peats for the winter, and a poor man must make the most of the weather."

The little man in knickerbockers began to jerk himself up and down. The stiff grey hair, close-cropped round the crown of his head, seemed to stick up straighter than ever. For the stranger was not only furious, but a little non-plussed; he could not reconcile Griff's speech and bearing with his occupation and his clothes.

"Do you know who I am, my man?" he sputtered at length.

"Rather too well. Captain Laverack, if I am not mistaken?" Griff's voice was quiet, but the smile had died from his lips, and his eyes showed hard.

"Yes, I am Captain Laverack. Perhaps you know, then, that I have rented the shooting over this moor?"

The little man was tempering wrath with an air of faint irony.

"I know that you played my father one of the lowest tricks I ever heard of. I am pleased to meet you, Captain Laverack; it will do me good to tell you what a rascally little cad I think you."

Laverack was speechless with amazement. Before he could find words, the second stranger had come up. Griff looked hard at the new-comer, and looked again; then he held out his hand.

"How do you do, Dereham?" he said nonchalantly.

Dereham hesitated a moment, then shook the proffered hand with as near an approach to warmth as he ever exhibited.

"Lomax—Griff Lomax—by all that's wonderful! I didn't recognize you at first—how could I, when I suddenly came

upon you masquerading as a son of toil? I always thought you were as mad as a hatter, Lomax, and now I know it."

"Lomax? Was Joshua Lomax your father?" interrupted Laverack. His self-assertiveness had crawled away out of sight.

Griff neither looked at him nor answered. The man was too much his senior, he felt, to admit of his knocking him down, and the temptation bore rather heavily on him just now. Dereham stared at them both, and wondered. Laverack shuffled his feet noiselessly among the peat-rubble; twice he made as if to speak, then thought better of it; finally, he turned on his heel, whistled to his dog, and set off across the moor. He turned after awhile.

"Are you coming, Dereham?" he asked.

"Directly. If we miss each other we shall meet at the lodge for lunch?"

Again Laverack hesitated, glancing from Dereham to Lomax, and making a rapid mental calculation as to the chances of Griff's silence.

"All right, one o'clock, sharp," he said, and went forward.

"What the deuce are you playing at, you and Laverack?" asked Dereham.

"Nothing; we don't like each other, that's all. If he asks you, when you rejoin him, how much I have told you—he is sure to do that—say to him from me that the Lomaxes carry their own burdens and never gossip about other people's."

Dereham laughed easily.

"By Jove, it sounds intense; but you always had a twist for intensity, Lomax, so I'm prepared for it.—Do you know, by the way, that Sybil Ogilvie is staying at Laverack's place?" he added, with a swift glance of inquiry.

Griff caught the glance full, but seemed untroubled. Then he looked down at his corduroys, and tightened his leather belt with a pleased chuckle.

"I hope we may meet; she would like me in this sort of rig. There's a good deal of stable-manure on my boots,

too, which would round off the idyll. Bah! Dereham, you wasted me a lot of my time, you little people in London."

Dereham lit a cigar before responding, and perched himself on a heathery knoll.

"I always did like you, Lomax," he drawled at last. "You're such an engaging original, and this last piece of foolery suits you better than any you've tried yet. Still that air of the Almighty about you, only a little more so. Where's the poor devil of a woman?"

Griff's face took an ugly shade.

"Whom do you mean?"

"Why, the cattle-dealer's wife—quarryman's—what was it? It would have done your vanity good—or your love, was it? only a matter of terms—to see the way Mrs. Ogilvie sickened when the affair became common gossip in our set."

"Dereham!"

Dereham removed his eyes from their lazy contemplation of the heat-waves dancing across the heather. Something in the other's voice startled him—some odd mixture of trouble and resentment.

"Have I put my foot in it? I'm beastly sorry if I have; I always was too lazy to think before I spoke. Was it—er—a bit serious?"

"Any man who speaks against *my wife* runs the risk of getting his neck broken."

Dereham changed colour; but he held out his hand with unaffected regret, and—

"Old fellow," said he, "I hadn't the least idea. You'd better kick me and have done with it."

Griff took the proffered hand and tried to laugh.

"All right, Dereham; only, I wish you hadn't."

"Well, yes; I fancy we both do. Coming, Rover, boy!" This to the pointer, who, after much uneasiness, had started off on his own account with a very business-like air.

Dereham, glad of a break in the discomfort, followed hard after the dog. Presently Rover put up a brace, and Dereham claimed one with each barrel. He returned to his former seat,

and Rover brought the birds to him, eyeing him the while with encouraging approval.

"I've made my peace with Rover," said Dereham, nodding lazily at the dog. "You never saw his equal for intelligence, Lomax. Before I sighted you this morning, he put up three almost under my nose, and I missed with both barrels. And that dog just turned his head round and said to me, as plain as could be, 'What a fool of a shot *you* are.' But I've retrieved my good name, haven't I, old boy?"

Rover implied an affirmative with his tail, and Dereham, for lack of certainty as to how he should proceed with his friend, began to stuff the grouse slowly into his game-bag.

"Well?" said Griff at length.

"Exactly. I was thinking that you've improved since I last saw you. By Jove, I like the way you flashed out on me just now! You're like a horse that has been out to grass for a month. Honestly, Lomax, I'm confoundedly glad you have dropped the Ogilvie nonsense. You didn't seem either excited or surprised when I told you how near she is at this moment."

"What is it? There shall the eagles be gathered together —something. You were always the alternate string to her bow."

"Ah, well, I find her excellent comedy, and that is the most you can expect from any woman. That was what irritated me, you know, when you took her in such screaming sincerity. You won't mind my saying, will you, that you were an astonishing fool in that particular?"

"I shan't mind in the least. I like it."

"Too much fetch and carry, too little compensation, unless you took it funnily. The fair Sybil was altogether too fond of pets in the old days."

"Has she changed particularly?"

Dereham grinned pleasantly at his friend.

"She treated you badly, in my opinion, and I'm hanged if I don't give you your revenge now—even at the price of your modesty. When you left town suddenly, after making an intolerable bear of yourself for three months on end, we

all prophesied—and Mrs. Ogilvie was sure—that you would come back. But you didn't, and Sybil began to feel it. The others said that she merely missed the most pronounced of those delicate little flirtations of hers, which did no one the least harm in the world—except the odd idiots who took her seriously. But I fancied it was more than that, and I've proved it since. The woman is wild for you; if I were to tell her you were here, she would forget—the interim—would forget every mortal thing except that she wanted you; she'd come——"

"Then for God's sake keep her away!" cried Griff, fervently.

"Her husband died in the spring, you know. Sybil is a changed woman, but she hasn't the heart even to pretend that it is due to his death. She just mopes, Lomax, and if revenge is any satisfaction to you, you've got it—as much as a man could want."

Griff went back through those fevered months—recalled how the touch of her hand had maddened him, how the curve of her baby lips had seemed to be the end and aim of all things. Yet, for the life of him, he could not make a substantial working memory of it now. The thing he had called love showed merely as a spineless, filmy ghost; the thing he knew to be love stood between him and the woman who had seduced him in all but the letter.

"Dereham," he said abruptly, "will you come and see my wife?"

"I was going to ask if I might. It's generous of you to suggest it after——"

"Never mind that. Will you come?"

"Yes; when?"

"To-morrow, if you can get off. Drop in for lunch—I call it dinner now—and we'll give you mutton and apple-dumplings."

"I bar the dumplings, but otherwise you may depend on me. Is your quarrel with Laverack serious, by the way?"

"Yes; it goes back to my father, and that means it is unforgivable.—It will make matters awkward for you?"

"Then let it. Laverack is all very well, but he's not going to stand between you and me. If he doesn't like it, I'll remove my traps to a pub, and spend the rest of my time helping you to farm."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LINK THAT BINDETH MAN AND WIFE.

After Griff had done with his peats, and had eaten a dinner proportionate to his labours, he set off for Marshcotes. Mrs. Lomax, with a cross-country tramp in mind, was just coming out of the gate when he arrived at the Manor.

"What, going for a walk? Absurd, little mother, under such a blazing sun."

"It is, rather; but what would you have, Griff? I must fill up my time somehow."

"That is another of your covert reproaches. I believe you are horribly jealous of Kate, if the truth were known."

The mother looked him wistfully up and down.

"Yes, I am—as jealous as possible. I miss you so, dear."

Griff, in a man's way, had not been wont to give an over-careful regard to the looks of those who were constantly about him. Something in his mother's tone, however, a certain touch of helplessness that was foreign to her character, set him scrutinizing her face. She seemed older and more worn, he thought, than when he first returned home, a year ago.

"You don't look quite yourself, old lady," he said tenderly. "Let's spend the afternoon in the garden, under that ridiculous lilac-tree which thinks it can grow at the edge of a moor."

"It is a very fine lilac, Griff," snapped Mrs. Lomax.

"Ah, I thought the fight wasn't all dead in you. Well, I won't abuse the lilac, and I'll even drink your home-made wine without a murmur, if only you will promise to amuse me this afternoon. I'm lazy, mother; don't let us go for a walk."

"Which means that you think *me* feebler than I was. Oh, yes, you do! I saw it in your face as you looked at me just now. I have a good mind to show you what I can do when I choose."

By way of answer Griff threaded his arm through hers, led her into the garden, and set her down by main force in the shady seat under the lilac-bushes.

"I have good news for you, mother," he said, breaking a long pause.

"About Kate?" flashed the old lady, with a woman's perspective, and a mother's half-resentful pride where a grandchild is in question.

But Griff missed her point utterly.

"No; what good news could I bring of her except that she is just as much Kate as ever? It is about Laverack; you remember telling me father's relations with him?"

"Yes, I remember well. Only—it is not a topic that pleases me, Griff."

"Not if I tell you that I met him this morning, and made myself known to him, and called him a cad to his face?"

Her keen old eyes brightened.

"You did that, Griff? Yes, it *is* good news. It may be unchristian, but I loathe that man. And if one is framed to love well, how can one help hating with a will, too?"

"Mother, mother, I despair of you! You're a dreadful Pagan, like the rest of us," laughed the son, anxious to glance off to other topics, now that he had conveyed his piece of information.

"Well, your father was a Pagan, right through to the core of him. I have had worse examples to follow, Griff."

"Did you object to his poaching, I wonder?" said Griff, teasingly. "After he was married, I mean."

"That, rude boy, is a question I don't choose to answer. It is unwise, though, they say, to deny a man his luxuries; but the pursuit is a discreditable one at best."

"I've done with it, at any rate."

An impatient half-sigh accompanied the words.

"I am glad of it."

"But, mother, you have no idea of the glorious rough-and-tumbles we used to have. Kate, though, has made me promise to keep a whole skin, and there's an end of it. Heigho! I'm glad the Squire and I made a decent finish to my career in that line."

A rattling of the garden gate came to them round the corner of the house.

"Some one seems to be trying to get in," said Mrs. Lomax. "Just run and open the gate, will you, Griff? You always bang it so hard, and the latch, like myself, is getting worn out."

Again that helpless note in her voice. Griff did not like it at all.

"Worn out?" he echoed. "Not till you give better proof of it, foolish mother."

"Boy, kindly flatter your wife, and leave tag-ends of sincerity for your mother." She tried to laugh, but the effort was not very successful.

Griff did as he was bid, and went to open the gate. At the other side stood Greta Rotherson.

"How do you do?" he observed, holding out his hand across the top bar.

"I'm very hot, rather cross, and exceedingly anxious to get under shelter. How would it be, Mr. Lomax, if you opened the gate?"

"Not just yet. I enjoy making you really angry; it brings such a quaint little flush to your cheeks."

"I don't want compliments," protested Greta, blushing rosier with pleasure all the same.

"You'll have to put up with them, I fear, if you won't change your looks. Even a staid married man like myself——"

"Married you may be, sir, but staid you will never become," said Greta, demurely. "I am going to knock at the back door, if you won't let me in at the front."

He opened at that, after weighty argument with the latch, and Greta tripped in, looking like a bit of fleecy, fair-weather

cloud in her muslin dress. Griff could never quite rid himself of the notion that she was just a pretty child, and he treated her accordingly. He wondered, in a way, at the preacher's infatuation; and, with his mole-like outlook on women as a whole, he asked himself sometimes if little Greta would be able to weather foul days as well as fair.

Mrs. Lomax brightened as she saw the girl. She had a better notion of these matters than her son, and never felt the least doubt but that Greta, for all her butterfly prettiness, was just the sort of woman to come out strong in a crisis.

"You are earlier than I expected you, my dear. I am glad," said the old lady, simply.

"Yes, father had to go off to Saxilton on business, and I thought you might like a chat—which means that I wanted one badly myself."

Then she and Griff began teasing each other, till Greta was likely to have the worst of it, and Mrs. Lomax interfered. And after awhile there came another rattling at the gate, followed by the scrunch of heavy boots on the gravel. Greta talked faster, without waiting for any one to answer her, and her cheeks were an honest crimson.

Gabriel Hirst, for once in a way, had come in a garb that was likely to advance his cause; though the accident of his taking Marshcotes Manor at the end of a long ride must not be set down to any cunning forethought on the preacher's part. He bungled less than usual as he came across the grass, and Griff smiled as he noted that his horseback humour was on him.

Presently Mrs. Lomax snared Griff into the house, on the pretext of talking over some business matters with him.

"Did you arrange this meeting, mother?" he asked, as he opened the parlour door for her.

"Didn't I tell you," she smiled, "that I have to find things to do nowadays?"

"I like the notion of your turning matchmaker. Pray, is this kind of meeting a regular occurrence?"

"I have very few luxuries, Griff.—Not that it is the least

good in the world. Gabriel seems always to be falling between two stools. He can't work properly, because he is in love with the girl, and he won't speak out like a man, because he is not sure yet whether she is a temptation of the flesh or not. You men—you men! If only you understood what a true woman's love is worth."

"The lassie would have him—eh, mother?"

"The lassie, sir, will wait till she is asked," retorted the mother.

When Griff reached Gorsthwaite that evening, it struck him that something was amiss with Kate. His late uneasiness about his mother had sharpened his eyes, and he was awake to the restlessness in Kate's movements. From time to time, too, she looked wistfully at him, and seemed on the point of speaking. More than all, he noted that she was disposed to be lavish of caresses, in a way that fitted ill with her wonted undemonstrative strength.

"What ails you, wife?" he ventured once.

"Nothing—nothing at all, dear. Why do you ask?"

"You are so unlike yourself. Have I left you alone too much lately? Say the word, Katey, and I'll give up the farming, and—and the horse. They take me away a good deal between them."

"Nonsense, Griff. You are going to give up nothing at all, except your foolish suspicions of me. I am the happiest woman in the world at this moment."

Alas for his inexperience! In that curious, half-hysterical assertion of happiness, he might have read all that she longed to tell him. But he missed it, and went on to talk of Dereham's coming on the morrow.

"He is rather fastidious, you know," laughed Griff; "what can we give him to eat? Luckily we have a brace of grouse ready for cooking. How would an omelette be?"

"I can't make them," protested Kate, vaguely uneasy at the mention of Dereham's fastidiousness.

"But I can—beauties! It is high time you learned; I'll give you a lesson in the morning. Oh, yes, we shall manage

famously! Tell the cook, wifey, that she can have a morning off to-morrow, because I mean to turn her kitchen upside down."

"Indeed, I shall tell her nothing of the kind. I don't trust you, Griff—you talk too glibly about it."

Griff stroked her cheek playfully.

"You think that omelette will turn out like the women I used to paint—half-cooked inside, and dried to a cinder outside? Well, we shall see."

As a matter of fact, the omelette, as well as the rest of the dinner, turned out remarkably well. Dereham had entered Gorsthwaite with an uncomfortable feeling that he was here to be bored by a friend's wife, to make the best of a foolish job; but as the meal went on, and Kate, in her straightforward way, took up his tentative comments on men and matters, emphasizing points of view which were too simple ever to have occurred to him, he began to wonder. From wonder he passed to interest; he clean forgot the passivity which was his especial pride; he talked little, and listened much to the words he enticed by strategy from his hostess. Finally, he felt regretful when Kate left them to their smoke.

"I begin to understand," observed Dereham, after he had silently worked his way through the half of a cigar.

"What do you understand, you oracle?"

"There you're off it, old fellow. Oracles never understand—they only pretend to. That is by the way, though. What I meant was, that you seem to be really established here."

"Why, yes. I should be sorry to desert Gorsthwaite in favour of any place you could name."

"I thought it was just a pose, you see; we all thought so. You're a different man altogether, Lomax, from the Ogilvie lap-dog I used to know. Suits you better, I think."

"Dereham, will you let Mrs. Ogilvie alone? You have exacted penance enough for that folly already."

"All right, my dear chap; I plead guilty. What I want to know, though, is, when are we to have another picture? Are you sinking into an animal pure and simple—a sort of

superior hog, that eats and drinks, and fills in the between-times with sleep?"

Griff, by way of answer, took Dereham up to the room he used as a studio. A large canvas stood on an easel in the middle of the floor. Dereham went close to the picture, to which the finishing touches had been put early that morning, and stood regarding it attentively.

"Humph!" he dropped at length. "Same style as the two eccentric daubs that the elderly critics profess to think so much of. Gad, though, there's something in it! Why, bless my soul, the figure in the foreground is your wife!"

Yes, Griff had struck a fine idea, undoubtedly. The background was a rush-fringed tarn, with a sweep of rust-coloured bracken on the right and a clump of heathery knolls on the left; in the foreground, standing on a peat-bed of brownish-black, was the figure of a woman, her eyes looking steadfastly out from the canvas, her body set to a careless strength of pose. One corner of the tarn, and the bracken to the right of it, were lit by the dying sun; the rest of the moorscape lay in brooding darkness. On the face of the woman was just that blending of light and sombre shade in which the moor-features themselves had been picked out. It was impossible to say which was the more alive, the woman or the lonely strip of heath; each seemed able to stand alone, yet each helped the other's strength.

"Anything else?" asked Dereham, after a pause, in his usual nonchalant tone.

"Yes; the companion to this. One I call 'Moor Calm,' the other 'Moor Storm.'"

Griff uncovered a second canvas lying against the wall. This time the background was a swirling sea of heather-tips below; and above, lightning and tempest and wind-driven, scudding night-clouds. The naked figure of a man held the foreground—a man eye to eye with the lightning, shoulder to shoulder with the storm; on his lips sat determination, but grim laughter lay in his eyes. The whole smote one with a sense of fearless, Fate-defying nudity.

Dereham shuddered a little as he looked—then shrugged his shoulders when he saw that Griff was watching him.

"Very fine, my friend, for those who understand it. I don't, for my part; it makes me feel cold and wet through."

"But I understand it!" interrupted Griff, giving a loose rein to his enthusiasm. "I never see the moor without thanking God that I took to painting instead of literature. The moor shifts her expression every hour, every minute: you can't stir without getting a fine, strong bit of canvas-work. Yet fools go wasting their time on waterfalls, and buttercup meadows, and milkmaids going kine-wards. Does it never occur to them that there is something worth painting, if they will only take the trouble to climb a few hundred feet to get it?"

"Well, I dare say it will bring you *kudos*," said Dereham, with a yawn that was intended as an apology for certain twinges of enthusiasm discernible in his own person. "For my part, I find these moors of yours devilish healthy, and devilish dull. I'm frankly in love with houses, and warm fires, and theatres, and the rest of it. If I hadn't met you, I think not even the shooting would have compensated me for coming."

"Like it or not, old chap," laughed Griff, "you will hear of me again when these pictures appear. Have another weed."

"I daren't, in this temple of the rough, the savage, and the naked. You can't imagine primitive man sitting with a cigar-stump in his mouth. No, it shall be a pipe.—Lomax," he went on, after he had lit up, "how do you find time to paint? I thought you were farming all day long."

"I only work when it suits me. My man is dependable enough, and he keeps things going. But farming puts me into condition, and that saves me from conceiving the flabby subjects which boomed me. I'm in the thick of it up here, too—right in the middle of human nature that isn't ashamed of its simpleness. Every day of my life I rub against good, sharp angles, and every day I thank the Lord that I am not planed down to a model human yet."

"Lomax," put in the other, with an air of grave profundity, "don't begin thanking the Lord that you are a publican and sinner, or you may be turned into a Pharisee."

"Away with your word-twists! I've done with them.—I say, Dereham, let's have a round with the gloves," he broke off, as his eyes fell on a couple of pairs that had been tossed into one corner.

Dereham looked Griff's lengthy muscularity up and down.

"Hit a man your own size," he observed, with a pleasant grin.

But he put on the gloves for all that, and they went at it hammer-and-tongs, as of old. Griff was more than a match for his opponent in height and driving power, but the slighter man had the advantage in quickness; and at the end of the bout they were on pretty equal terms with regard to blows given and received.

"That does one good," panted Griff. "I am not allowed to slip out at nights now, Dereham; little moonlight picnics have been knocked on the head. It's a big responsibility getting married."

"Of course it is. Preserve me from having a woman pin her heart to my coat-tails; it must be no end of a drag."

"You are an ass, old fellow," retorted Griff, tranquilly; "it is the finest spur a man can have."

"Lord, Lord! this life is dulling you; I knew it would. Let's talk of the weather."

"It is odd to think of four of the old set coming together on one narrow strip of moor," said Griff, breaking a lengthy silence.

"Four? Who's the fourth?" asked Dereham, sharply.

Griff, remembering Roddick's secret, bit his lips and answered nothing.

"I think I can guess," said the other, presently. "The other night I saw something up above the Folly that gave me a clue; it was lucky for them that the stars and I had the sight to ourselves. Roddick disappeared from town as suddenly as you did. Is that the secret? Well, it is safe enough

with me. Roddick may be a fool for his pains, but he's a jolly good sort. As to the oddity, I don't quite see it. I have been due to come to the Folly for a fortnight's shooting ever since last winter; so has Sybil Ogilvie; Roddick follows for the best, and the worst, of all possible reasons—and, hey presto! where has your mystery gone?"

"Shall you go to see him?"

"Yes. Where does he live? I can't leave without saying how-d'ye-do to him. Do you know his story, by the way?"

"From start to finish. Poor beggar, he's in a tight place."

"I sometimes think," said Dereham, with a carelessness that sat oddly on his words, "I sometimes think that if I had lost all that makes life worth living, I should go and strangle that beast-wife of Roddick's. Not that I should, really; but it would be the truest service one could do him."

"I have played with that notion, too; it would be a tough problem to settle, if——," said Lomax, musingly.

When Dereham had gone, Kate came and stood by the mantelshelf, and looked down at her husband, who was sprawling contentedly in his big easy-chair. He was well satisfied with their little luncheon-party. Truth to tell, he had been anxious as to the effect which Kate would produce on this half-tender, half-cynical friend of his butterfly days; it was not, he told himself, that he really cared a straw that his own opinion should be endorsed, but he did shrink from the thought that Dereham might go away and vaguely pity him—that smacked too much of insult to his wife. Dereham, however, had left no doubt of his admiration for Kate. As he shook Griff's hand at the door, he had muttered, "You'll do, old fellow. Can I come to see your wife again?" And this meant more than it seemed—it meant, in brief, that he envied his friend his prize. And a man likes to feel this, be he never so secure in his own judgment.

So, being content, it did not occur to Griff that there was any underlying trouble in his wife's eyes—though the trouble was more in evidence than it had been when he noticed it the

night before. She crept to his knee presently, and took his two big hands in hers.

"Griff!"

"Yes, little woman? How very solemn we sound."

"You won't be angry if I ask you a question? Did I—did I shame you, Griff, before your friend? I know so little of the world, and——"

"Child, be quiet! How dare you hint at such a thing?"

Griff was frowning more than he knew of. He hated this resurrected doubt, after it had been laid to rest once and for all; he had not been proud of himself for feeling it, and Kate had no business to allow it to come into her head.

She saw the frown. Her lip trembled. The next moment she had buried her face, and was sobbing like a child.

"Wife, wife! what is it all about? Did I speak harshly? I didn't mean to; only, it was so absurd that you could shame me in any one's eyes, and—Kate, what is it? You have never given way like this before."

She made no answer for a long while; when she did raise her head at last, it was to whisper something that set strange new pulses beating in the man. He understood now; and as he took her on his knee and let her cry it out against his shoulder, all his wildness seemed to have merged into one steady wave of tenderness.

And then Kate laughed, low and soft, with a note in her voice that dated forward.

"He is to be a boy, Griff—he *must* be a boy—and—and—you will not be ashamed of *him* when he comes, will you, dear?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIGHT AT THE QUARRY EDGE.

Griff Lomax, waking at half-past five of a morning towards the end of August, lay on his back for awhile, and thought how fine the moors would be looking at this time of day. Then he pictured that wooded cleft below Ling Crag, where the water came down sweet and cold from the uplands. He had not had a dip there since he learned that the old mill was occupied again; the aloofness of what he had once regarded as his own private bathing-place seemed to be violated, and he had not cared to risk a meeting, while under water, or during the process of towelling himself, with either of the miller's women-folk. But he argued, as he lay on his back this morning and watched the sun-chequers on the ceiling, that no one would be abroad at this time of day, and that if he made shift to slip into flannels forthwith, and run to the stream, he could enjoy his bath in peace. So he jumped out of bed without more ado, leaving Kate fast asleep, and crossed the moor at a gentle trot. He made his way through the dew-weighted grass, and reached the pool where Greta Rotherson had paddled on that long-ago Sunday when the preacher came over the crest of the ridge above. The rains had been heavy of late, and the water came dancing down at a rattling pace, white with foam-flecks, and brown with moorland peat. The pool, though neither deep nor wide enough for a swim, could give a tolerable bath to one who knew it as Griff did. He slipped out of his flannels, plunged in, grasped an outstanding branch of hazel that leaned low to the water, and let the current carry the rest of him as far as his six-feet-three would go; the stream broadened into

shallows an inch beyond his toes, and Griff had always flattered himself with the belief that the pool had been made expressly for him. He shouted with glee, and kicked up his heels, and buried his head among the scattering minnows; and when he had had enough of it, he sought the fallen pine-log on the bank. The log, too, was an old friend; time and weather had stripped it of its bark, and the surface, smooth and porous, was quick at catching the sun-rays and keeping them. Griff filled a big pipe and lit it; then he lay along the log, and mutely thanked Heaven for a good many things, and left all drying operations to the sun and the log between them.

The sound of a door creaking on its hinges came to him round the bend of the stream.

"By Jove, they get up early at the mill!" he cried. "I suppose I had better tumble into my clothes."

He had slipped into his trousers and shirt, and was stooping for his coat, when Greta Rotherson ran lightly down the path. She stopped on seeing the intruder and half turned her head, as if meditating flight.

"Good morning, Miss Rotherson," laughed Griff. "I've been having a bathe. May I put on my coat in your presence?"

"I think you had better, Mr. Lomax."

The girl came forward a few steps, smiling at the absurdity of his question.

"I have no right to be here, I'm afraid; but I used to bathe in this pool a good deal, and I could not resist the thought of it this morning."

"How did you find it out? I thought no one bathed here but myself."

"How did I find it out? Do you know how long I have lived on Marshcotes Moor?"

"I couldn't guess," said Miss Rotherson, demurely, seating herself on one end of the log.

"Thirty odd years. Is it likely, now, that I should miss a stream as good as this one is?"

"You are like the rest of them, Mr. Lomax. You're awfully proud of having lived here all your life, and you—not

exactly look down on, but you—*pity* us who come from the South."

"Do I?" smiled Griff. "How do you know that?"

"Oh, you do; you all do! I don't like your people up here; they're too *hard*."

"Did you ever get to the heart of one of us? We're as soft as butter, once you smash through the rind."

"But you never confess it when—when people want you to."

Greta Rotherson blushed, as she spoke, in a vexed kind of way, and Griff knew, as well as could be, that she was thinking of the preacher. But he daren't so much as hint that he knew the state of affairs, though he was always jogging Gabriel's elbow, and striving to push the silly fellow nearer to his goal.

"We are crossed in the grain, I fear. Don't be too hard on us, Miss Rotherson," he laughed.

And so, what with one thing and another, they talked for half an hour, these two, seated one on each end of the warm pine-log. They laughed, and jested, and teased each other, from sheer vigour of youth and good spirits, until Griff looked at the sun, which was a reliable watch to him.

"It is getting late," he said, rising and stretching his long legs. "Have I been keeping you from your bath all this time?"

"You have, but it doesn't matter. I daren't ever risk it again, though, now that I know people intrude. Good-bye. When are you coming to have a pipe with father?"

"As soon as I can, if you'll have me. Good-bye."

"They are hard in a way," mused Greta, when he had gone, "but they're *grit* somehow. Why on earth hasn't Gabriel a little of Mr. Lomax's easiness? It is so silly being in love with a man you have to give a helping hand to. And Gabriel isn't a bit sure yet whether I am a wile of the devil or merely an angel. Did I say I loved him? Well, I don't. He's stupid. I am going for a run on the moors instead of thinking about him."

Griff strolled gently homeward across the moor, with

the tingle of cold water on his skin and the morning wind fresh in his face. What was left a man to desire, he wondered? He opened his shoulders, his mouth, his nostrils, to the wind and the peat-reek, and watched the sun-rays dance across the moor. Cobwebs were slung, like fairy hammocks, from heather-bough to heather-bough; the peat was springy to the tread; a lark was vowing that he'd never grow tired of singing, and a moor-emperor moth, a dandy gallant in gorgeous raiment, flitted across his path.

"What fools there are in the world!" said Griff to himself. "When I think of people living in the valleys—as I did myself for a goodly number of years—it makes me laugh."

But Gabriel Hirst, at that moment, felt no gratitude towards the sun, nor did he realize how good it was to be alive. Five minutes after Miss Rotherson had perched herself on the log, the preacher turned out of the Ling Crag high-road and walked quickly towards the mill. It was his wont nowadays to creep about the mill purlieus, in the hope of catching a glimpse of Greta—or a glimpse of her casement, if the greater boon were denied him. He could not live through the twenty-four hours without this pilgrimage of his; sometimes he came at noon, oftener at twilight, but he rarely had courage to step forward and claim a word with the girl; it never occurred to him that a passion so overmastering as his could meet with a like response, and he feared to blurt out the sum-total of his folly if he spoke with her overmuch. Greta, of course, knew a good deal about his stealthy approaches to the mill, as women will get to know these things; and she wondered how a man could be a man in all else, and yet be such a sorry fool in matters of love.

This morning Gabriel Hirst had awakened at four, and could not get to sleep again for thinking of Greta. He tried to drive the thought away; for one of his old frenzies had been coming to a head lately, and he was keenly alive to the wiles of the flesh. He ran over St. Peter's words on the subject of plaitings of the hair, and cringed at the thought that he had only yesterday feasted his eyes on the brown glory coiled above

Greta's shapely little head. He told himself, as he turned into the wood-path through Hazel Dene, that this must be the last of his tributes to carnal desire, that he must never—— But down below him sat Greta on her pine-log, with Lomax jesting at her side. Like a man struck blind was the preacher; he stood quite still at the gap in the bushes that had first shown him the scene, but his eyes were too full of dancing lights to see more than the one quick glance had shown him. Away went doubts of the spiritual future in dread of the concrete present. This could be no chance meeting; the hour was too early, the Dene too far out of Griff's way. Were they laughing at himself, at his clumsy ways and honest love-fears? He pressed his hand tight above his heart, as if he had received a mortal hurt. Griff was false—that was the thought which shaped itself in his mind, after long struggling with the numbness. Vaguely he crept away from the spot—up the steep hillside, through the pasture-land above, on into the moor. No lust for vengeance had yet crept in to goad his manhood; he followed the instinct of all sorely stricken creatures and tottered to some unknown hiding-place—anywhere, so long as he got out of reach of his fellows.

Slowly the need of vindication slid into his consciousness. He quickened his pace a little. Righteous anger followed stealthily, telling him that Griff had stooped to the meanest treachery that a man can play his friend. His feet went forward more bravely. Finally, he was all aglow with a rage that swept clean away every despairing thought of loss. He ran like a wild thing through the purpling heather, till Hazel Dene lay a good three miles behind him; he was out of breath by this time, and he sat down in a clump of cranberries to rest awhile. He had gone out that morning with a copy of "Baxter's Call to the Unconverted" under his arm—a book, much in vogue with an earlier generation, in which Gabriel was wont to find strong stuff of a quality he loved. He opened the book at random, hoping to chance upon some counsel fitted to the occasion; but he drew blank, and shut the stained old pages with a snap. One solitary quotation from the

Scriptures assailed him with untiring pertinacity. "Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord," he muttered.

He got up from the cranberry-bushes and strode off again across the moor. It hurt him to feel that excuse for action rested, not with himself, but with a Higher Power. A sense of futility weighed him down.

The sun was dropping westward before hunger insisted on a hearing. He had been fasting lately, and his body was weakened; old stubbornness bade him fight the hunger, but he remembered that there was no longer a reason for self-castigation—no longer a reason, it seemed, for anything in earth or sky. The scepticism which, years before, had preceded his conversion came and went, alternating with the dulling consciousness that vengeance belonged to the Lord, not to himself. Gabriel Hirst was rudderless in the depths of a stormy sea.

Desire for food was the one straightforward agent. He looked across the moor and saw a black-walled cottage standing up against the sky; without conscious thought he took a bee line, over bog-land and dry, to the cottage. At another time he would have recognized Sorrowstones Spring, but this afternoon the country showed only a blurred, unknown waste. A surly admonition to enter greeted his knock, and he went in. Old Mother Strangeways was taking down a canister of tea from her cupboard; she turned and looked him up and down.

"Oh, it's thee, Gabriel Hirst?" she croaked. "What dost 'a want?"

"Food. I'm like to drop with hunger."

She laughed mirthlessly.

"Then drop, tha praching crow. I know thee well; tha'rt friends wi' young Lummax, if I'm noan mista'en."

The preacher winced.

"I'm no friend of his, nor he of mine."

"Art'n't 'a? Sin' when?"

"Since the morning. He's played me false, and it's a pity that vengeance belongs to the Lord."

Rachel dropped into her chair and motioned Gabriel to take the other.

"Tha looks too mich of a fooil to be a liar, Gabriel Hirst," she said meditatively; "what's agate atween thee an' him?"

The preacher was tired and disposed to seek sympathy. The aptness of Mother Strangeways' questions seemed to call for straightforward answers. He told her what he had seen in Hazel Dene. The woman's face ran into queer wrinkles as she listened; it seemed that her prayers had brought to Sorrowstones Spring a man well fitted to compass what was now her one aim in life.

"It's i' th' breed; it's a trick of his father's, yon. He'll hev his way wi' th' lass, an' then he'll leave her i' th' mud, to fend for herseln an' th' babby," she muttered eagerly.

The preacher rose, his face on fire.

"Woman!" he cried, "if you frame your unclean lips to such words again, I'll——"

"Nay, nay, lad. It's noan me 'at wants to hurt thee. Tak a bit o' that sperrit wi' thee when next tha wends to Griff Lummax.—Summat to eat, sayst 'a? Ay, an' gladly, though I'd hev seen thee starve on th' doorstun if tha'd been a friend o' Lummax's."

Gabriel's fire went out; there was no bodily fuel to keep it going. He ate of the coarse stuff that was set before him, and drank of Mother Strangeways' rum. She watched him from under her white eyelashes.

"Vengeance is th' Lord's, tha says?" she muttered. "Happen it is, if tha taks th' thing far enow back. But this I tell thee, Gabriel Hirst, th' Lord 'ull damn thee for a fooil if tha waits for Him to help thee. Dost think summat is bahn to shooit out on th' sky an' strike this Lummax deäd? I thowt that myseln, lad, for a while; but now I know 'at just as mich as a man fends for hisseln, so mich will th' Lord fend for him. It's share an' share alike wi' wark o' yon kind, an' tha cannot look to get all an' do nowt."

Gabriel muttered incoherently to himself, and Rachel Strangeways thought that a new intensity of purpose was gripping him.

"If tha's getten a doubt i' thy heäd still, tha can mind what Griff Lummax did to my Joe's wife. He telled thee he war innocent as a sucking lamb, likely. Well, a man that 'ull do one kind o' dirty wark 'ull do another. What's a two or three lies when a Lummax hes owt to gain by telling 'em? An' now he's tired o' th' wench, an' off he goes speering after thy sweetheart. It's th' talk o' th' moorside; tha mun be daft to sit so long wi' thy hands i' thy lap."

Gabriel Hirst, in the simplicity of his nature, was always apt to fall into the delusion that, if any one prefaced a statement by a generous exposure of some other person's falsity, then the statement in question became at least doubled in value. It was easy just now to attribute dishonesty to Griff, and Griff's accuser shone by the contrast in the light of a rigid truth-teller. He pushed his empty plate from him and leaned his head on his arms.

"Well, tha's etten enow, seemingly," croaked the witch; "put thy mouth to th' bottle again, an' off tha wends to Griff Lummax, to settle thy scores like a man."

The preacher would have taken well-nigh any counsel in his present shiftlessness of mind. The withered hag, glowering across the peat-smoke at him, seemed to be preaching a new, an inspired, gospel. Her words smacked more of the Old Testament, which he loved, than of the New, which in his wilder moods he only tolerated. Slowly he got up from the table and went to the door.

"Lad, I've summat to ask of thee afore tha goes," said Mother Strangeways, shifting her voice to a whine.

Gabriel turned and glared at her, but said no word.

"Tha knows how th' owd clock goes a-wobbling, wobbling, wobbling, hour in an' hour out? Well, it's getten past all; it dithers fit to drive a body dizzy-crazy, an' my lad Joe, th' gaumless wastrel, willun't bring me a two or three screw-nails—nobbut a two or three screw-nails; that's all I'm fashed for, an' he willun't bring 'em—an' me that hes reared him fro' being a babby. Tha'll happen along wi' th' screw-nails, willun't tha, lad, sooin as tha's done wi' Griff Lummax?"

But Gabriel, before she had finished her appeal, was out of the door and off across the heather towards Gorsthwaite Hall. Now that he had a purpose, he could see the moor as he had known it from boyhood; he knew his way.

Kate was going in at the door of Gorsthwaite as he came up. She turned and smiled a welcome on him.

"It's long since you've been here, Mr. Hirst," she said. "Will you come in and wait for Griff? He has gone to the Manor for the afternoon."

The preacher stood dumbfounded. He had had the one simple plan in his head, and this deviation from the settled order of things left him witless. Kate decided that he had been wrestling with the devil on an empty stomach, and pitied him.

"I—I'll not come in," he stammered at last. "I'll—walk back—to Marshcotes. I may meet him on the way."

"I can't promise that you will. Sometimes he stays late—but you'll find him at the Manor, if you are anxious to see him."

"Yes, I'm anxious—anxious; that is just it," he muttered.

The preacher turned and set off towards the village. He passed a wide-lipped tarn that lay in the valley between Gorsthwaite and Marshcotes Moor, and stared at its sulky waters; he hesitated awhile, then passed on. Another mile brought him to a disused shaft—Whins Quarry, it was called—and a look that was almost of joy came into his face as he peered over the fifty feet of rock-face, down to the pool that swallowed up the old cart-track on the far side.

"I can't face other folk—his mother, say. I'll just wait here till he comes," muttered Gabriel.

The sun crept lower, and still Gabriel lay among the heather. The sun went to bed, and the long summer twilight drew to its close; still the preacher waited. A four days' moon showed in the paling sky—a mere wisp of yellowish light, that served, for all that, to make some sort of atonement for the vanished day. A light-hearted song came drifting across the quiet moor. Gabriel Hirst leaped to his feet. A quick thought seized

him; he raised his head proudly, as if he were looking God straight between the eyes.

"Vengeance is Thine, O Lord!" he cried. "But Thou knowest I am the fulfiller of Thy desire."

The song came clearer. Gabriel could hear the words now.

"The fulfiller—O Lord of Heaven, give me strength!" he prayed.

A figure swung into view and neared the quarry with easy strides. The preacher went to meet him.

"Griff Lomax!" he called.

"At your service; but who the deuce are you?"

"Gabriel Hirst."

"Of course you are. I ought to have known your voice anywhere. Have you come from Gorsthwaite?"

"I've come to tell you that you are false—a liar and a thief."

Griff took the preacher by the arm, but he shook it off.

"Gabriel, you're out of your mind. What ails you, man?"

"You thought it was safe to meet in Hazel Dene, before folk were out of their beds. You laughed to yourself often, I'll warrant, when I told you what store I set by Greta—and all the while you were——"

His friend broke in with a hearty laugh.

"Is that all? I knew you were a tolerable ass, old fellow; but I didn't credit you with going quite so far as this. The last time you turned jealous, you were very drunk; are you sober now? Why, the girl has eyes for none but you, and I've done all I can to plead your cause. This very morning I was telling her that we are soft at the core up here, though hard in the rind; and she said, with a pout in her voice, 'But you never confess it when people want you to.'"

"She said that?" cried the preacher, hoarsely.

"She did. You should know best what she meant, Gabriel."

Again Griff laughed, and Hirst fancied the laugh was one of mockery. He had his settled view of that meeting by the

stream, and Griff was assuredly taunting him with Greta's own avowed preference for his rival.

"You're a liar, and I'll fight to prove it," he yelled, and leaped on his adversary.

Despite ill-treatment of his body, the preacher was tough; but Lomax was the better man in a tussle. They were locked close together now, swaying this way and that. Griff, though, was not heated as Hirst was; he was conscious of the mistaken cause of fight and felt loth to do his mad friend a hurt; and Gabriel, consequently, had the better of it at the first. Then Griff roused himself; he hoisted the other well into the air and let him drop with a thud.

"It's soft falling, Gabriel; lie there awhile till you're cool enough to listen to reason."

But the preacher was up again. He knew little of wrestling in the theory, yet by force of blind instinct he compassed a good imitation of the trick known to Cornishmen as the "Flying Mare." One hand he planted in the pit of Griff's stomach; with the other he seized him by the right arm, and lifted him clean over his head. The force of his own throw sent Gabriel staggering back; he was conscious of coming to rest against some hard body, while down below he heard the splash, splash, splash, of loosened stones and rubble—that, and the deeper sound of some heavy mass plunging into the water that filled the pit-shaft.

The preacher began to understand matters, as he recovered from the struggle, from the surprise consequent on the miraculous fashion in which he had lifted Griff. There had been death in his mind when he chose the quarry as the meeting-place—a hazy, theoretic notion that one of them had better go over the edge. But he had lost all that in the stress of the fight; he had been bent only on throwing his enemy; he had never stopped to think how close they might be to the low wall that guarded the quarry from the moor. Yet here was he, leaning against the wall—it had saved him from falling—and peering down at the stagnant pool which lay, fifty feet below, at the bottom of Whins Quarry. That dull splash echoed and re-echoed in his

ears; the faint light showed him no more than a few feet of the rock-face, but memory brought that surly pool before his eyes as plainly as if it had been broad day—and in fancy he saw there the body of his friend lying face upward to the stars.

With a start the preacher came to himself. He did not pause to call himself a murderer; he only knew that, if Lomax were dead, he had cut one half of himself clean away for ever. The man's great love for his friend—never quite realized till now—made the thought of Griff's death such unbearable agony that perforce he must do something. Yes, he must act. He had but one thought now—he might save old Griff, if that clear drop of fifty feet had not broken his neck. Perhaps he was now struggling in the water, too weak to save himself from drowning. He raced along the path of sliding shale that flanked the left of the quarry-edge, caught his foot against a rock less yielding than the rest, and fell headlong down the hill, at the foot of which he lay for awhile, stunned, among the rubble.

When he next opened his eyes, the moon had set. Still half dazed, he groped his way to the cart-track that led to the quarry; the starlight, faint above, was quenched altogether by the surly face of rock that towered above the pool. A night-jar, away up on the moor, railed at the silence; only the lurid fires of God's vengeance lit the darkness, and these were powerless to break the physical gloom. He shook off his stupor. There was a wild humour in his striking a lucifer-match to show him what God's fires had failed to render clear—but he saw not the humour. The light shone fitfully across the pool, and was swallowed up by the glooming quarry-face. There was nothing floating on the surface, save the rotting carcase of a dog.

The preacher stood motionless, almost calm. He was predestined to damnation, and the striving was over, once for all; there could be no return to the old life of fruitless prayer, of wasted fight. A loosened stone dropped into the water, and that fall, too, was predestined. All, all was foreknown: the good works of the just, the evil living of the sinful, were alike predestined; there was neither virtue in holiness, nor blame in wrong-doing, since both alike had been fixed from the beginning.

All responsibility was shifted from the preacher's shoulders, and he felt happier than he had yet done through the long years of strife.

Gabriel Hirst grew almost curious, with a dumb, passionless curiosity. He wondered what form his punishment would take; whether retribution would be swift and final, or tortuous and long drawn out. Perhaps—nay, certainly—a touch of pride lay, all unguessed, at the bottom of his heart; it was, in a sense, a fine thing to be the very focus of an Avenging Universe.

He went out by the cart-road, and moved faster as he gained the heather. The motion warmed his blood and quickened his pulses; he remembered Greta—Greta, who shared his heart with the dead. He fell weak at that, and must have comfort. There was none on earth to give him comfort, save Greta. As a dumb brute eats the healing herb, not knowing the reason that underlies its instinct, so the preacher went straight to Hazel Dene and knocked at the miller's door. The kitchen clock struck ten as he waited under the porch.

"Who's there?" came Greta's voice, a little tremulous.

"Gabriel Hirst. For God's sake, open!"

The bolts flew back and Greta stood on the threshold.

"You frightened me, Mr. Hirst. Father is away for the night, and Nancy is in bed. I thought you might be——"

"A murderer," finished the preacher, with horrible calm. "You were right. I have killed my friend."

She looked at his face, and sickened. But there was strength under that maiden timidity of hers, and she loved this man. She put her arm through his and led him into the parlour; then she went to lock the door again—it gave her a moment's respite—and crept back to the preacher's side, and did not care now if her secret showed plain in her eyes.

"Gabriel, what is it? I have a right to know," she said.

He saw it all now. It was very plain to be read, even by Gabriel Hirst, who had ever been slow to learn these womanish matters. The swift knowledge that she loved him seemed to give him nerve to go forward with his tale.

"I came up Hazel Dene this morning," he began, without any beating about the bush. "I saw you and Griff Lomax—the woman I loved, and the friend I trusted—sitting beside the stream. You were laughing and jesting—at me and my blundering love-ways, I told myself—I thought you had met there often. I waited for Griff on the moor, and we fought. It was close to the edge of Whins Quarry, though it had gone clean out of my head how near we were. The devil entered fairly into me at last, and I closed with Griff a second time and flung him over my shoulder. He dropped clean into the quarry, and I heard him splash into the water at the bottom."

She loosened her hold of him and fell back with a moan. There could be no doubting his story.

Soon she began to frame excuses for him, with a woman's nimble wit. She spoke after a long while.

"Gabriel, it was a fair fight. You did not know of the quarry; you—— Gabriel, did you do it for my sake?"

"Not for your sake," he muttered huskily. "Don't think, child, that *the sin* was for your sake; that couldn't be. I was mad with jealousy."

"But the jealousy was mine?" Strange how she had already set aside the catastrophe, as being a matter of lighter moment.

"I loved you too well, Greta, and the Lord grudged it," said the preacher simply.

The girl got up from her chair and stood eye to eye with him.

"Love!" she cried, with a little sobbing catch in her voice. "What do you mean by love, Gabriel Hirst?"

A quiver ran through the preacher. His eyes dilated. His hands went out and gripped invisible shapes.

"Love is a thing that makes you run mad and grovel like a beast—that makes you run sane and soar like an angel. Love is more than the Law and the Prophets, and a lifetime of fighting with the devil.—Nay, Greta, forgive me. Lass, I yearn for you so—and—I—forget that I am a murderer."

"You love like that?" said Greta, slowly. "Then, dear, you can take me and do what you will with me."

The preacher felt two arms about his neck, and a warm mouth against his own. Murder, and sin, and vengeance of the Lord, they were all blotted out for one full moment. He knew himself a man.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTERWARDS.

JUST as Greta and the preacher, in Miller Rotherson's parlour, were struggling out of their dream—just as the woman was beginning to wonder how it would fare with Gabriel if Lomax were really dead, while the man was framing a resolve that touched the present—there came a rattle, and a whirr, and a grinding of iron against iron from outside the house. The rattle settled into a steady, rhythmic boom. Gabriel thought of Invisible Powers, but Greta could have cried tears of joy because of the relief afforded by the interruption.

"The mill-wheel has broken loose; we must go and see to it," she said.

It was a queer old building. The mill was separated from the house by a strip of kitchen garden, but a rickety wooden bridge crossed from the upper floor of the mill to the miller's bedroom; the bridge dated back to a time when most of the house itself was used as a granary, and old Rotherson still crossed by it whenever the fancy took him. Greta led the way upstairs to-night; sound sleeper as Nancy was, her mistress did not care to risk unbarring the heavy kitchen door; she and Gabriel wanted no third person to intrude just now.

Across the swaying bridge they went, the preacher silent, Greta chattering glibly, with hysterical eagerness to hoodwink her knowledge of calamity. Gabriel's eyes were devouring her greedily, hopelessly; the shadow of a parting stood between them and that short-lived happiness of a moment ago.

"The sluice-gates must have given way," said Greta. "Father said, not long since, they were getting too old to see

much more service, but he thought they would last a little longer."

"The beck was in flood as I came up the Dene to-night." The preacher's voice had a far-away note in it, as if his words had no bearing on the matter in hand.

"Yes, that must be it. Do you know anything about the machinery, Gabriel? We can't stop the wheel. What will happen if we let it turn the whole night through?"

They were standing close to a pair of mill-stones. Gabriel, still regardless of aught beyond the bitter expiation that lay before him, let his eyes wander to the "shoe" which fed the stones.

"Know about the machinery?" he repeated vaguely. "Yes, I know the ins and outs. Your father explained it all to me one afternoon."

He no longer dared to look at Greta, but kept his eyes upon the grain, as the hopper doled it out to the shoe, and the shoe to the running-stone. The supply of grain stopped; a curious grating noise sounded from below, as the upper stone found no better work to do than to grind at its neighbour's face.

Suddenly Gabriel recalled what the miller had told him about the danger of leaving the stones unsupplied with grist. Like a flash he was down the ladder and across the littered floor to where the driving-belt was going its merry round. He took a stick that was lying close to his hand, and pushed the belt from one of the supporting pulleys; the belt hung limp, and the mill-wheel might turn as it would now for all Gabriel cared. The sweat was running off his face as he came back to Greta's side.

"What is the matter? What have you been doing?" she asked, at a loss to account for this fresh perturbation of his.

"Switching off the belt. Lass, if we had let those stones grind much longer, they would have blown the place up."

"Blown the mill up? But how?"

"They'd have grown hot enough to set fire to the dust between them—and that would have meant death to all in the house, Greta."

Greta, troubled with the glimmerings of a new hope, rested her forehead against the cool stonework of the window. The idea took shape at last; she turned to the preacher with a motherly, protecting air.

"Gabriel, suppose you have kil—suppose some one did fall over the quarry-edge—haven't you saved two lives to-night? If you had not come, I should never have known the danger, and—Gabriel, isn't it worth something to have saved my life?"

For a moment the preacher clutched at this specious solace. He had paid two human lives for the one he had taken—would not the Almighty think that a fair exchange? But he lost the hope.

"There's no expiation, save one. Come away, Greta, and get to bed," he said doggedly.

As they re-crossed the bridge, Gabriel glanced instinctively towards the swirling water on their left. What gleams of light were abroad caught the tips of the wavelets, the slimy paddles of the wheel. He shivered as he watched; his mind flew back to that other stretch of water, where his friend was lying. The din and hurry of the mill-wheel seemed cheery by contrast with the silence of the quarry.

They passed through the door that opened into the miller's room. Greta set down her candle on the washing-stand.

"You want to get rid of me. What are you going to do, Gabriel?"

"Never mind, lass, never mind."

She took fright at his wildness of look; she feared he would do himself an injury if left alone. Forgetful of all else, she just held open her arms, and—

"Gabriel," she said softly, "stay with me. I can't bear to let you go."

Her cheeks grew red with shame when she had got half way through with the words; but what did anything—anything—matter, so only she could keep Gabriel from harm? So long she had waited for him; was she to lose him in the first flush of possession?

Whatever there was of passion in the preacher—and he was full of it, to the finger-tips—leaped to the front. He trembled from head to foot; those soft arms seemed to draw him beyond all resistance. With a cry he stepped towards her—then stopped. The habit of a lifetime, in this supreme moment, was not minded to stand idly by, taking no part in the struggle; were his sins against God so slight that he dared add one more to their number? He moaned in the agony of repression. And down the girl's crimsoned cheeks ran tears of helplessness. The candle went out and left them in darkness.

"Greta," said the preacher at last, "his wife will be waiting up for him." The quiet voice, the commonplace words, sounded odd after the stress that had preceded them.

"Whose wife?" she whispered, not daring to acknowledge the certain answer.

"Griff's. My way lies plain, lass; I must go and tell her." He went out to the stair-head; Greta followed him into the lamplight.

"You shan't—you shan't! No one need know. No one saw you. Perhaps he isn't dead, after all, Gabriel? You fell and lost your senses, you say. It may have been all a dream—a kind of nightmare—and you said there was no body to be seen. We will wait, and if"—she crept close and looked at him with horror-stricken eyes—"if an accident did happen, we must go away together, you and I—I shan't mind it a bit, dear; we will begin in a new country, and——" She had forgotten her father in the first wild panic for Gabriel's safety.

"No, Greta. My way lies clear, and you can't turn me. First to tell his wife, and then to give myself up—it's as plain as can be."

"And what of me?" cried the girl. "Don't you understand that there are two to reckon for now? For your own peace of mind you must go—but what of mine?"

The tears rose in the preacher's eyes.

"Lass, don't make it too hard to bear. I am not fit to claim you, and you'll be well rid of a scoundrel. Let me go, and have done with it."

She put her arms round his neck, but he forced them away and went down the stairs. Without one backward look he left the house and struck up towards the moor; it was the hardest effort—save one—that he had made in all his life of conflict. He did not hear the footsteps that sounded behind him all the way up from the mill.

As he gained the moor he started to feel a hand laid in his. Greta was nestling to his side.

"Go back, go back, I tell you!" he cried.

"Never, Gabriel. You thought it was a light thing to win a woman's heart? You thought I should stay safe indoors, while you went across the moor—in the darkness? If you must go to his wife, I go with you, and tell her the things you leave out of your story."

He turned, desperately. It seemed that his every instinct towards the right was being frustrated.

"Greta, haven't I enough to bear? Your shoulders are over young, lass, to take their share. Go back, and put me out of mind."

For answer she took his hand and led him towards Gorsthwaite. He gave up the contest, suffering himself to be led. Together, in an awful quiet, they crossed the nodding sweep of heather. Late as it was, a light shone out from the old Hall.

"She is waiting up; I knew how it would be," whispered the preacher. "Can you see her there, Greta, listening to the wind—starting up at each fresh sound—thinking her husband's come home at last? Can you see her face when she opens the door for us? Can you see her drop on the floor, as I blurt out the truth, never stopping to break it gently, for fear of going mad if I didn't get it over at once?"

"Hush, dear, hush!" pleaded Greta.

He was quiet for a space; then, "Vengeance is Thine, O Lord!" he cried. "Vengeance is Thine; only make me less of a coward for this one short while!"

The back-thrust from his sense of failing purpose made him beat noisily on the door with his fists. From within they heard a man's shout—

"He's here! I knew he'd come."

The preacher leaned heavily against the door-post. It was Griff's voice—Griff's, who was lying at the bottom of Whins Quarry. But Greta was quicker to hope than he, and she guessed the truth.

"You are later than I expected; come in, old fellow," said the figure on the doorstep. "What! you're not alone! Miss Rotherson, is that you?"

She came and rested both hands on his shoulders, out of sheer gratitude to him for being alive.

"I have brought Gabriel to tell you"—she stopped, and laughed like a child—"to tell you we can't live without one another."

The preacher moved forward, groping his way till he found Lomax. He ran his hands over him, this way and that, like a blind man.

"Griff, is it true; is it true, lad?"

Griff caught him by the hands and wrung them till the preacher's arms were like to start from their sockets.

"Do I feel like a dead man?" he laughed. Then he pulled them both indoors. A couple of tumblers and a spirit-case stood on the table. "Do you see those, Gabriel?" he asked, pointing to the glasses. "I was so sure of your coming that I made ready for you. Don't look so scared, man! Put down this brandy, and you'll see things a bit more squarely."

The brandy did wonders for Gabriel; it gave him nerve, and discounted the supernatural. Griff showed plainly enough now as a being of flesh and blood.

"Tell me about it," he said at last.

"There is little to tell. A touch of fight wasn't amiss, but we were fools to stand at the edge of the quarry. You got me over your head—the devil knows how you did it—and the next thing was that I found myself stuck in the middle of a thorn-bush growing out of the rock-side. My face will show you that I had a pretty warm reception. When I got the hang of things again, and began to wonder how I was to climb out of the mess, I remembered that hospitable thorn-bush well; I used to come

bird's-nesting there when I was a boy, and I reached it by a broadish ledge of rock that jutted out from side to side of the quarry just below the bush. I let the dizziness get clear, and a crawl of a few yards brought me safe across. That's the whole story."

"But I heard you splash into the water," said Gabriel.

"That you didn't! I'll warrant that, and I ought to know. What you heard, I fancy, was a big stone that came tumbling down from above while I was stuck in the bush; it missed my head by about six inches."

"Then I nearly killed you twice," murmured the preacher. "I remember loosening a piece of the wall when I fell back against it. Griff, lad, I have done you a fearful wrong."

"Fudge; drop that sickly over-sentimentality of yours. Misses don't count in the rough-and-tumble of life, and anyhow it was a sheer mischance.—So you've arranged matters, you two, at last? Well, it was about time. Gabriel is so dull-witted, Miss Rotherson, where his happiness is concerned."

Greta wondered that he could stoop to light banter at such a time. But she looked at him more closely, and she read in his face what the effort meant to him. Yet Griff was smiling a moment later with genuine merriment; he was thinking that it was a more awkward scene for Gabriel than if he had really been dead, instead of very much alive.

"Does your wife know?" asked Gabriel, suddenly.

"Of course not. No one knows but we three. I told Kate I had slipped over the quarry accidentally—so I had, in a way. I said you might be coming in to-night to talk over your worries, because I guessed you would rush off here to blurt out what had happened. I know you to a hair's-breadth, Gabriel, you see. Make your mind easy on that score, old chap."

"I shall tell her," said the preacher, quietly.

"Tell her? You'll do nothing of the kind! Nay, Gabriel, there is a limit. Once let you do this, and the next thing you will be standing on the churchyard steps to admit all Marshcotes to the secret."

"Your wife must know," persisted Gabriel.

Greta stole a look at him; and dearly she loved that rugged light of determination in his face—the face that had once seemed plain to her.

So absorbed were they in their own affairs that they had not noted the figure standing in the doorway. It was Kate, her hair tumbled about her nightgown, her bare feet heedless of the cold oak on which they were resting.

"Gabriel Hirst," she said, "was it you who sent him over the quarry-edge?"

The preacher tried to look her in the face, and failed; tried to speak, but his throat was dry. Kate repeated her question, in the same deep, relentless tone.

"It was," whispered Gabriel, hoarsely.

"Then God forgive you, for it's little forgiveness you'll ever get from me."

Griff, for the first time since he had known her, was furious with his wife.

"Kate, for shame—for shame!" he thundered.

But across the room she sent him such a look of tenderness —of idolatry, almost—that his anger died within him, and the shame returned on himself.

The preacher stood with head downcast; he had not come here to plead against a fair judgment, he had come to bear his punishment. A hush settled over the two men, and over the women who loved them.

Then it was borne in on Greta that the man of her choice was being cruelly ill-used. An anger, fierce as Kate's own, gave her words with which to meet the crisis.

"Have you never loved your husband, Kate Lomax?" she cried. "Have you never felt what it would mean if some other woman came between you—some woman who pretended to be your friend, and played you false behind your back? Would you want to kill her, or is this talk of your moor-bred women so much idle chatter?"

Kate looked at her husband again. That graphic touch of rivalry brought a grim smile to her lips.

"I think I should kill her," she said quietly.

"Yet you rail at Gabriel, just because he made the like jealousy a cause for fighting. You have not heard the whole tale yet. Your husband met me by chance this morning in the Dene; Gabriel saw us laughing and talking together, and jumped to a stupid conclusion."

"Is that all your defence?" said Kate, with a curl of the lip. "Was that his excuse for—what he did?"

"It was enough. He was blind, because he loved me and feared everything; he was strong, because he thought he had right on his side. And now, since he showed himself the better man, he crawls in the dust before you. *I* would not have done; I am proud that he fought so well for me."

Kate had ever been too quick in passion to dwell long with resentment. Her nature was generous, too, and no doubt of her husband's share in the adventure stepped in to mar her generosity. She admired this quiet girl for the way in which she had suddenly blazed forth in defence of the man she loved. She had a struggle with her pride, and then proved it by submission. She came across to Greta and took her by both hands.

"I will forgive him," she said, in her grave way, "because a good woman has pleaded well for him."

Not till Greta had given way and sobbed out furtive little apologies in Kate's arms did it occur to the older woman that her costume left certain details wanting. From the moment when she had first heard the voices outside her window, until the last clearing storm, she had thought of nothing but the new light that was thrown on Griff's recent danger. But now she looked down at her ten pink toes, and flushed dismayedly.

"Come upstairs with me," she said to the girl, and fled.

"Well, old fellow, I hope this is the last word about an unlucky job," said Griff, venturing at last to break the silence.

"Nay, not the last," answered the preacher, gravely. "There is expiation, lad, ahead of me."

CHAPTER XXII.

WHITE HEATHER.

"KATE," said Lomax, a few days after his adventure with the preacher, "not a stroke of work shall I do this morning; the sun is hot, and the breeze cool, and altogether it's a day in a hundred. Come out with me, and we'll lie in the heather and look up at the sky. It will do you good, little woman."

The sweetness of a wifely confession came between their glances nowadays. There was a new wonder in meeting each other's eyes, and Kate nestled close to his arm on the slightest pretext. She came to him now, and ruffled the hair away from his forehead.

"What a forgetful boy you are. One day you make your mother promise to come and see me, and the next you forget all about it. Only, I wish we could have had our morning together," she added wistfully.

"Fie on you for a witch! I never used to forget anything to do with mother before I knew you. Would you like to walk as far as Marshcotes, and we can all come back together?"

"I don't think I ought, Griff. The doctor may know nothing about it—he probably doesn't—but he was very anxious that I should not do much walking."

"Then you shall wait here for us. Get the maid to pack up a hamper; I'll bring mother, and we will find a picnic ground somewhere on Gorsthwaite Moor. You need not walk more than a mile all told, and it is a sin for you to miss a day like this."

But Griff did not reach Marshcotes. His stride slackened

to a saunter, and even the saunter was too much exertion by the time he had gone half the distance. Knowing that Mrs. Lomax would pass him on her way to Gorsthwaite, he tumbled into a warm bed of heather, lit his pipe, and watched the shifting colours of the moor. The pulsing crimson-purple of the heather, shot here and there with fainter splashes of heliotrope, the hoarse chuckle of the grouse, and shriller wail of the plover, the peaty reek creeping from a rush-girdled marsh on his right—all these things were emphatic in their assertion that it was exceeding good to be alive. His thoughts went out to the child that was to be born to him: pride in his race, and zeal for its continuance, quickened the paternal instinct in him; he travelled far into the future, and saw another Lomax at the Manor, strong as himself, who would poach as his fathers had poached before him, who would ride fearlessly and fight like a man, and keep a big slice of his heart for the love that should one day come to him.

The sunlight grew fainter. A fitful breeze ruffled the heather-tops. A haze crept across the sky, from the horizon upwards. The sun failed altogether, and flying squadrons of mist appeared, now making eager forward rushes, now wheeling, gyrating, eddying to and fro in their efforts to dodge the pursuing breeze. The mist-wreaths grew denser; they turned but little now, and fled across the darkening purple like a band of hunted witches.

Still Griff did not move. He was watching the elfin-revel, and thinking of the old moor legend that a White Lady rides on the swirling mist, tempting men to their doom in the bogs that take, but render never again.

"It would need a marvellous White Lady to tempt me astray nowadays," murmured Griff, and laughed as he thought of Kate.

A voice came out of the mist.

"Bertie, is that you? How can you lie on your back there, while I am dying of fright in the middle of this horrid moor?"

Griff knew the voice at once; it had thrilled him too often in times past to admit of doubt. He rose slowly and lifted his

cap to a figure that loomed out of the fog-wall a few yards away.

"No, I'm not Dereham. Perhaps you have forgotten me, Mrs. Ogilvie?" he said.

She came close up to him—a little hothouse woman, with a delicate, rounded waist, and lips that were always either pouting or pleading. The blush-rose tints deepened against the waxy white of her cheeks, as she held out her hand. After a pause—

"Who would have thought of meeting you here, Griff?" broke out the woman, impetuously. "And yet—I—half expected it. Bertie told me you had buried yourself in this wretched place, and I—yes, I did—I *hoped* I should run across you here. There! I should never, never have confessed the half of that, if I had not been so awfully frightened."

She was devouring him with her eyes, in a strange, famine-stricken way that startled this quondam slave of hers. Griff, remembering certain remarks of Dereham's, realized vaguely that she would be in his arms before the end of the scene, unless he took strong measures.

"Frightened by what? A touch of mist in the middle of a summer's morning? You are a baby, Sybil."

She fell back a step. Her mouth trembled, her eyes filled with tears. Over and over again she had reasoned out Griff's faithlessness to her by woman's logic. His flight from London, his vulgar after-dissipation—or what had seemed such to her—his failure to come back to her side—they had all been twisted into proofs of his hopeless captivity under her yoke. It had been so easy to believe this, while away from him—and now, he showed hard and cold as an iceberg.

She tried to smile with her old winning artlessness.

"You are awfully rude, Griff, but perhaps I shall forgive you that; it is not a new *rôle*, this of the barbarian. Still, you might at least say you are glad to meet an old—friend. I haven't approved of you lately, you know, and you were horribly brusque before you left town, but——"

"I am always glad to meet an old friend. Do you mind if I smoke?" said Griff, refilling his pipe.

Sybil Ogilvie saw that the battle was to be to the strong, and she kept back her tears, though again they were very near the surface. Neither spoke for awhile. Griff was stinging under the lash of remembered follies. He saw, as if it had been written under his eyes, how this woman had fooled him in the past; he writhed as he looked at her, and understood what flimsy excuse he had had for raving about her. And now that he was out of reach, her passion had ceased to be a plaything; spoiled to the last, she only cared to have what was beyond her grasp. Her voice, her eyes, her hair, all irritated him beyond measure; chivalry was out of court, and he would not pity her.

"How did you get here?" he asked, in a hard, matter-of-fact voice.

"I walked up with Bertie Dereham to hunt for white heather. The mist came on; he went ever such a little distance away to find the track, and the fog swallowed him up. We shouted to each other, but 'here' sounded to be just anywhere, and I rushed about the moor till I nearly dropped with terror and weariness. Then I found you, and—I don't mind the mist, Griff, any longer."

"Your compliments were always pretty, Sybil. I used to believe them."

"When you were half a bear only, it didn't matter; but now I am getting awfully afraid lest you should eat me up." Yet her playfulness was dulled by the pitiful tremor in her voice.

"You came in search of white heath? Our blood runs red up here, and so does the heather. It was a wild-goose chase at best," said Griff, deliberately, with a meaning she could not fail to catch.

Still she would not give in. It had become her life, this yearning for the love she had trifled away.

"Griff, you don't, you can't mean to be so brutal! When are you coming to live in town again? You are more yourself there."

"Never," said Griff, bluntly.

She laid one hand on his sleeve.

"Griff, dear, haven't you a little—just a little—consideration

for us poor wretches who happen to be—to be fond of you? It is a sin to hide yourself among these barren moors."

Still he felt no twinge of pity—only the goad of past weakness.

"It is a sin to *seek* at times, Sybil. You have told me as much—often. You were so very good that you shamed me into virtue, and sent me up here out of the reach of temptation; why do you not let well alone?"

The irony in his voice made her wince. She turned and moved away from him, into the whirling mist. The first suggestion of pity touched him.

"Don't go like this," he said, more gently. "Let us part friends, for old times' sake."

She faltered and came back. Even those few steps away from him had taught her what a final separation would mean, and she resolved to risk all on a single throw. Without parley, with a suddenness that left Griff resourceless, she was in his arms.

"Griff, will you never understand? Take me, take me, for I can't live without you. Things are all changed, dear; I am free now, and—Griff, I love you so." Her voice broke, her helplessness was pitiably real.

Once, Sybil Ogilvie would have said that it was only country hoydens who indulged in these crude lapses of taste. Yet there were few farm-wenches in all the Marshcotes moorside who could have brought themselves to show so little restraint, so little of the pride of shame; this dainty, well-bred child of the world had outfaced them all.

Griff held her away from him, looking straight into her eyes, with a glance that was half of contempt, half of impatient pity.

"You never stopped to ask, Sybil, if we were both free."

In this supreme moment of his revenge, vengeance seemed a sorry thing. Men cannot but deaden themselves to the faults of a woman who is wise enough to love them; yet under all this Griff was chivalrously ashamed that any woman should so have humbled herself before him.

Mrs. Ogilvie looked at him with startled eyes.

"What do you mean? Not that—oh, Griff, not that *you* are bound—married?"

He nodded silently. He was marvelling that he, or any man, had been able to strike down to a bit of real feeling in this baby-temptress.

"Do you care for her, Griff?" she asked suddenly.

Again he nodded. Protestations seemed out of place.

Sybil turned her face from him, and looked for inspiration to the white-armed maidens of the mist. The gambler's madness was on her now. If Griff were to be won, she must stake, not pride only, but honour and good fame; it was too late to draw back to half measures. Four walls of fog shut in their little square of beaded heather, giving the woman courage to believe that no hint from the outside world could reach them there.

"Griff," she cried, stamping one little foot on the ground, "I won't believe that you love her—I won't—I won't! You were mine two years ago, you are mine now. How dare you mock me with this talk of another woman!" The anger died; her voice grew low and soft; her baby lips pleaded with him. "Such a warm little nest I have always kept for you, dear, in my heart—warmer than ever you dreamed of in the old days. And when my husband died, I thought you would come back to me, I thought you would ask me to tell you what I was free to tell without staining my honour. But you never came, and I feared I should lose every bit of prettiness I had, Griff, in crying my eyes out for you." She was watching his face, and the pity in it nerved her to the last effort. "I have gone too far, too far. Oh, my dearest! what is honour if it goes with a barren life?"

Griff moved impatiently up and down, gnawing at the stem of his pipe. What an utter baby she was—spoiled and selfish, with never a thought for any happiness but her own. His anger was rising quickly. What would Kate say to all this, he wondered?

Before he could speak, another figure staggered out of the

mist—a short, thick-set man with a scrubby beard and a flushed face. He tripped over a clump of cranberries, and fell prone at Mrs. Ogilvie's feet. She clung to Griff's arm in terror.

"It's thee, is't?" said Joe Strangeways, scrambling to his feet again and looking from one to the other, his hands in his pockets, his legs moving backwards and forwards to maintain their perilous equilibrium. "It's thee, Griff Lummax—robbing another chap of his wench, I'll go bail. Tha'rt a bonny un, thou art, an' proper." He turned to Sybil. "Clout his lugs for him, woman, an' send him trapesing home again. He'll bring thee to shame, will Griff. It's all th' trade he's getten."

Mrs. Ogilvie began to laugh, in a false key. Griff had seen her in hysterics once, and he knew the symptoms; without more ado he gave her a good, hearty smack on the cheek, and, "Don't be a little fool, Sybil!" he muttered harshly. Then he took Joe by the arm, and led him into a sheep-track that crossed the Gorsthwaite path at right angles. "That is your road, Strangeways," he said quietly. "The mist is clearing already. You'll get home by night with luck."

Both his victims stood irresolute from surprise. Sybil had forgotten hysterics altogether in the smart of the blow and her anger at such unwarrantable treatment. Joe found it hard to meet his enemy's matter-of-fact item of information. Finally, the quarryman, swearing and grumbling, took himself off along the track indicated, and Griff returned to Mrs. Ogilvie.

"I'm very sorry," he said, laughing at the absurdity of this last scene in the drama; "I'm very sorry if I hurt you, Sybil, but I was not going to have you on my hands in the middle of the moor. See, we shall have the sun out again in a minute or two. I believe we went to sleep, you and I, and dreamed we were in a fog, and you, or I, or both of us, said a quantity of foolish things, which we can't remember now. Shall I put you on your way to the Folly?"

She went with him passively. Nothing mattered very much now; it was kind of him, she felt vaguely, to smooth over his denial, but what did words signify? Her passion crept under shelter, whimpering.

The mist dispersed as quickly as it had gathered. The piled banks melted to fleecy, lace-like bits of scudding vapour. The moor was a twinkling sea of mist-beads, that shamed to fainter crimson the heather-tips from which they hung. Gorsthwaite Hall showed clear at the top of the rising ground ahead.

"Who was that brute? He seemed to have some quarrel with you," said Mrs. Ogilvie, at last.

"I robbed him of the best woman God ever made. Let him be," Griff answered, with a warm impulse to acknowledge the place which Kate held in his regard.

Sybil flashed round on him, her eyes ablaze.

"Then I have loved a fool—just a fool?" She shrugged her pretty shoulders, and laughed mirthlessly. "I have made a mess of my self-respect," she went on, with bitter frankness; "I should have minded less if the woman who claims you had been other than the cast-off wife of a clown. Griff, you will make me hate you yet; love cannot survive the jar of absurdity."

Griff answered nothing, for Kate herself was standing at the Hall gate. He had thought of skirting the house at the rear, instead of risking this meeting by following the proper track; but he disliked the suggestion of cowardice in such a plan. As he glanced from the delicate bundle of drapery and affectation at his side to the steady, splendid grace of the wife he loved, he was glad of the meeting.

"Kate, here is an old friend of my London days, whom I have just rescued from the mist. Mrs. Ogilvie, this is my wife." For a fleeting moment Griff understood that revenge may be exceeding sweet; then he crushed the feeling.

Kate inclined her head, and smiled with the ease of a woman who trusts her husband. Sybil Ogilvie, too, tried to smile; but she did not mind one whit the less now that she found her rival worthier than she had thought her.

"You will come in and rest after your walk?" suggested Kate, in her even, rounded voice.

"Thank you, no. I shall be late for luncheon as it is, I am afraid. If your—your husband will be kind enough to show me my way——"

"I'll come with you; you will never find it alone."

"No, *please* don't. I can manage quite well if you put me into the road."

"Nonsense. You would drown in a bog, or something. Kate, if mother walks over now the mist has cleared, will you tell her I shall be back in the afternoon? Don't wait dinner."

At the end of ten minutes' walking—

"You were very careful to call me Mrs. Ogilvie before your wife. Is she jealous in these cases, Griff?" cooed Sybil, feeling it wiser to taunt than to cry, since she had only the two alternatives from which to choose.

Griff muttered something softly to himself, and they walked on in unbroken silence for another mile. The cold, impersonal bearing of her companion roused something of Mrs. Ogilvie's pitiful prudence.

"You won't—how shall I put it?—I have made myself ridiculous—you won't breathe a word of it to any one, will you—to Bertie Dereham, I mean, or——"

He simply stared at her in unfeigned wonder. Ill-advised her late confession might have been, but it had seemed passionate enough. Surely she might have let this old hedging mood of hers wait until another day.

"Don't look so shocked, Griff!" she went on hurriedly. "Of course I don't for a moment think you will—be unlike yourself in that way—only——"

"Only you are not sure; thanks," put in Griff, curtly, looking straight before him.

She put her hand on his sleeve.

"Don't be harsh, dear; we have not long together."

He shook off her touch, laughing bitterly. How could he feel compassion for her, when she let her detestable little suspicions kill pity before it was half awake?

"No, we have not long together, Sybil. Let us talk of the last new play, or the old after-theatre suppers, or some topic we are sure to agree upon."

"Be quiet!" she cried, the tears starting to her eyes.

But the tears were wasted, for Griff would not look at her. Mrs. Ogilvie, now that she had disposed of her mean instinct towards prudence, came swiftly back to the desire for a forbidden plaything which she mistook for love; she shivered at thought of her coming loneliness; she was ready to accept this half-tamed bear on his own terms, though he had laughed at her pleading and slighted her tenderness. She wanted him either to kiss or to thrash her—it scarcely mattered which, so long as she broke through his indifference.

They reached the wind-driven fir-tree under which Roddick and Janet Laverack had kept their Christmas tryst. The sun was warm on Frender's Folly, but no sunshine could overlay the brooding sadness of the place; rather, there seemed an added desolation, as when light shines dumbly on a dead man's eyes. Sybil stopped, and pointed across the smooth-shaven lawns that lay beneath them.

"Isn't it like a grave? Griff, you don't know how eerie it is down there; I dread going back to it."

"Come, Sybil, don't talk about graves in the middle of a September day. The Folly is well enough; eat a good lunch, and you'll find it twice as desirable a place. Good-bye; I must turn back here."

She clutched at him with her little gloved hands.

"You shan't go in this way, you shan't! *Eat a good lunch* —is that your farewell, Griff, after—after all that has been?"

"*And* drink a half-bottle of Burgundy; I forgot that." Not at any cost was he going to have a repetition of the scene on Marshcotes Moor. And that unwarrantable pity was beginning to touch him again.

She looked from the castle keep to the sweeping purple of the moor. Twice she was on the point of speaking, and twice she stopped herself. Then she crept close to him, and held up her face, and pursed out her baby-mouth.

"Sweetheart, have you no pity?" she murmured.

He took her two hands and touched them lightly with his lips.

"It would do us no good, child. Go back to the old life;

you'll forget me soon enough, if you only make up your mind to it. There, don't cry! I'm a brute, and there is an end of it. Good-bye."

He turned sharp on his heel and left her. Sorry he was, but nothing more; he knew that she would forget, and the present trouble seemed to him scarcely more than a child's first taste of toothache. He forgot that the agony of a fall into a two-foot pond is very real if the victim imagines it to be as deep as the sea.

Once he looked back. Amid the glowing waste stood a little hothouse figure of a woman, with yellow hair and a dimpled white-and-pink face. He thought it a quaint picture, and waved his hand twice, and swung off across the heather to the wife who would be impatiently awaiting his home-coming.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A "REVIVAL."

THINGS had gone hard with the preacher since Greta and he went hand-in-hand, like a couple of guilty children, across the moor to Gorsthwaite. It was out of the question that Greta should return that night, whatever the result of her absence might be when it came to her father's ears. Gabriel, too, was induced to spend the night at Gorsthwaite; so tired out was he with trouble and the quick succession of trying scenes. But the preacher was tough in the fibre, and the night's rest well-nigh cured his body, while it gave his mind fresh vigour to understand his own Titanic worthlessness. Had he been able to fly from Greta—lest he should contaminate her—it is probable that his first instinct on awakening would have been towards showing a clean pair of heels, under the delusion that he was doing the lassie a service; but luckily his duty ran with his pleasure for once, for it was clear, even to his perceptions, that the miller would hear of Greta's leaving home the night before, and that a sufficient explanation must be forthcoming.

So Gabriel took the girl home about eleven of the next morning, and, finding Miller Rotherson just returned from his journey, gave the kindly old man a full and faithful account of the whole affair. The miller rubbed his chin when Gabriel had finished, and looked at him quizzically.

"So you want to marry my daughter? Well, I don't know about that. It seems to me you're far too hot-headed to be comfortable as a son-in-law. For all that, I can't rightly see that you show up so badly in the matter. You fought because

—but we won't go into that. At any rate, if it weren't for you, I should have neither daughter nor mill at this moment. But to marry her—it's asking a deal; well, we must think about it."

And soon after that it was known through the length and breadth of Ling Crag village and Marshcotes parish that Gabriel Hirst and the miller's daughter were "bahn to be wed." Betty Binns named Greta "a forrard young hussie, about as fit to be a godly man's wife as skim-milk is fit to butter your bread;" and the rest of the village thought as much—for was not poor Greta "a furriner"?

And this was the beginning of a hard time for the preacher. He had trafficked too little in happiness to accept it quietly when it came. He felt an earnest need for some set-off in the shape of misery, and he had that fight with Griff ready to his conscience. The more he pondered over it, the greater seemed his offence. True, Griff looked at him nowadays with a kindlier eye than ever before; true, the sin had brought him his heart's desire (next after God, he added, but the parenthesis carried little conviction even to himself). But was the sin any the less in that it had borne good fruit? If he held that, he was no better than a papist, an idolater—and that was almost the hardest rap Gabriel could give himself.

In the middle of his troublous time, there came a strange preacher to the Ling Crag chapel, to conduct the anniversary services there. He was known throughout the country, the Rev. Abel Bell, as a powerful mover of men's hearts, and the Ling Crag folk expected great things of him. Nor were they disappointed; the stranger, at the end of half a dozen sentences, had put himself out of reach of the captious criticism to which the villagers were wont to treat their superiors in godliness; before they had recovered from this unwonted sense of inability to carp, they were snared into enthusiasm. There was a meeting of the class-leaders after morning service, and they unanimously decided to ask the new preacher to stay for a few days and conduct a series of "Revival" services. Gabriel Hirst was ripe for any wildness when Wednesday came. The three Sunday services, with the evening calls to the unconverted

on Monday and Tuesday, had already wrought him to a high pitch of nervous tension; contact with Greta and that growing sense of his unworthiness combined to bring him up to fever heat.

The "Revival" enthusiasm spreads like a contagion when once it is set going. From Ling Crag and Marshcotes and the scattered farms for miles around, the people came. On Wednesday evening there was not a seat to be had; the pews were full, the long wooden benches were full, and there was scarce standing room for those at the back of the chapel. Near the front sat Griff Lomax, who had not witnessed a "Revival" for years, and who felt a purely irreligious and unbiassed interest in proceedings which were calculated to draw the naked hearts out of his usually taciturn neighbours.

The Rev. Abel Bell mounted into the pulpit, and talked with homely vigour. No simile was too wild, no illustration too commonplace, so long as he held captive the imagination of his hearers. Divinity, he held, had once walked in rough mortal garb, and in rough mortal metaphor only could the Divine truth be understood by men. The subtle fire ran in and out among the congregation. Hearts that were wont to keep within the limits of their own hardened shells leaped out to one another; as they had been strong in restraint, so they were strong in abandonment now that the fitting time had come. Each man looked at his neighbour, and yearned over him, and prayed that salvation might reach all present. The minister grew frenzied.

"The Devil is trembling!" he shouted, with a voice that seemed to be tearing at the lining of his throat. "Heaven and Hell are fighting for the souls of men. The Devil is trembling—Heaven is winning. Into the fight, brothers; give the Devil a oner! ('Praise the Lord!' 'Glory!' 'Hallelujah!') Into the thick of it, friends, and smite with the arm of God! ('Hallelujah!')" He pointed with his hand to the chapel door. "See him there—see the Devil scuttering out with his tail between his legs! Angels are rejoicing; the battle is won. The gates of Heaven stand open—one and all, come in."

("Praise the Lord!" "Glory!" "Hallelujah!" reiterated the congregation.)

His voice fell to a pleading quietness, but mounted and mounted till it rang like a trumpet-call.

"Heaven, my brothers and sisters—if you knew what was meant by Heaven, there's none here to-night but would search for Jesus till he found Him. We are blinded by folly and sin, but we've got eyes that can see the sky, which is the window of Heaven. When the earth wants warming, out comes the sun, and laughs over moors and woods and fields. When the earth gapes with thirst, then God Almighty sends the blessed rain-clouds—packed up ready, carriage paid, free of charge. ('Glory! Glory!') This night we must gather the sinners in to the Lord—gather them in ('Hallelujah!'). There's a table spread in the courts of Heaven, and all that are saved can sit down to it. Ask for what you will, and you've only to pass up your plates—and all the while the golden harps will be playing, and the cymbals clashing, and God will be there at the top of the table, ready to smile on one and all and send them down whatever they ask for. Why will the sinners stay on the wrong side of the Golden Gates? It's cold out there, and it's wet, with a keen east wind that cuts you to the bone. Will you come in to the Lord, friends, out of the cold, out of the wet? Think what it means! if once you let the Gates be shut on you, from the cold you'll be hurried away to the Burning Lake, and you'll burn there for ever and ever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Unstop the ears of the hardened, Lord; conquer their deafness; gather them into Thy bosom. Glory, glory!"

When the sermon was finished, the minister and the class-leaders went in and out among the congregation, exhorting them to effort, aiding them in the desperate struggle to "find Jesus." Groans and cries went up on every hand. The agony of doubt was bitterly real, the swift flash of belief a true and priceless blessing. Griff was the only one present who looked on the proceedings from a dispassionate, outside standpoint. There had been a little—just a little—pitying contempt at the

bottom of his interest in the Revival; but now that he was in the thick of it, now that the cries of "Hallelujah!" "Found pardon!" "Glory, glory!" came thick and fast, drowning the anxious calls for aid, now that the uncouthness of his neighbours was lost in their strenuous sincerity, Griff knew that he had been minded to scoff at what was above and beyond cheap raillery; the thrill of contact with this seething enthusiasm shot through his nerves and gripped him with awed amazement.

A rude bench was carried to the foot of the communion-table. Those who had found salvation rose, one by one, and went to the bench and knelt with their arms on it, to wrestle with the remnants of their unbelief. Class-leaders and minister went busily to and fro, like bees at heather-time, arguing, pleading, praying with those whose hearts would not be softened unto grace. Surely, if man's whole prayerful effort, man's utmost power of will, could bring a Presence from the Unknown Without, then God was in this little moorside chapel.

But Gabriel Hirst was not forward with exhortation, as of old. He stood in a shadowed corner, his arms folded on his breast, his eyes wild with a battle of terror and determination. Griff, glancing up with an uneasy consciousness that some one was looking through and through him, met the preacher's eyes. In a flash it came to him what Gabriel was finding heart to do; he made a movement as if to cross to him, but stopped. What could he say or do to keep back this confession of a deed that was finished with long ago? He could do nothing, save watch the preacher move forward to the front, and listen to his stumbling words of introduction. Then Gabriel, finding his manhood, faltered no more, but walked steadily up the pulpit steps. His voice was low and firm; only the piteous working of his face betrayed his torment. He told how, upon a certain day, the seed of a thorn-tree was dropped in the cleft of a quarry-face; he described the breaking of the seed-shell, the growth of the sapling; he brought before the eyes of those present the picture of a merciful God watering the tree, tending it with jealous watchfulness. Then he talked of another seed, the seed of jealousy and hate. Years were needed to measure

the growth of God's handiwork; but the evil in man increased by days, by hours, by minutes.

Then, on a sudden, his voice went deeper. He leaned over the pulpit and looked across the sea of anxious faces to the place where Griff was sitting.

"Stand up, Griff Lomax, and come to the front, and tell them all what a man did to you on the brink of Whins Quarry."

But Griff made no movement, and the preacher told his own story.

"The seed of jealousy was set in this man, and it grew in the space of a single day, till he was ripe for blows—nay, for worse. He waited for his friend at the edge of the quarry-face, and murder was in his heart."

"Glory, glory!" shouted a woman at the rear of the chapel. She was in the throes of her own personal need for salvation, and her shout of joy came with a weird irrelevancy.

"The man was myself," went on Gabriel, "and the friend that I waited for was Griff Lomax, whom I had loved as my own brother—ay, as David yearned over Jonathan I had loved the lad. But the seed of hate was planted, and grew apace. He came along by the path at the quarry-side, and I closed with him. The devil had gripped my heart; I forgot that the edge was close behind us; I cared for nothing in heaven or hell but vengeance. The devil strengthened my arms. I lifted the lad and threw him over my shoulder."

"Hallelujah! Found Jesus, found Jesus!" yelled a weather-beaten quarryman, seated under the pulpit.

Gabriel paused and dashed his hand across his forehead; the sweat ran off in a stream and dripped to the pulpit ledge. A hoarse murmur went from lip to lip of the listening crowd.

"I heard the rumbling of stones as he went over the brink, and then a splash in the pool at the bottom."

Every eye turned to Griff, sitting with a rigid face, like one returned from the dead. A superstitious awe gained on the folk; they were ripe to credit a miracle in their present exalted state.

"I ran down the hill and fell, and lay in a swoon for a

while," went on the preacher. "When I went to the pool, there was no body there, and I pictured him lying in the mud at the bottom—lying, and waiting till the trump of the Judgment Day called him to tell what he knew."

Griff hardened his face yet further. He found it a strain not to wince under those keen eye-shafts, focussed on him from every quarter of the chapel, like needles about a magnet. The preacher, regarding him steadfastly, rose to a splendid height of egoism.

"But God had been watching over this moment, watching over the feet of Gabriel Hirst, the least and most sinful of His servants. Before I came into the world, He had set the seed of a thorn-tree in the side of the quarry; the tree grew, till its branches were strong to support the fall of a man. The brother I loved, the brother I had all but killed in my hate, fell safe into the bush, as God in His mercy had ordained. The sin of will is mine, black as ever, but the sin of the deed has been lightened. Lift up your hearts, ye children of God, and thank your Father for His mercies, and take heed by my own fall how you let the devil creep into your hearts."

His voice was weakening, his grip of the ledge in front of him grew less firm. But he had something yet to say.

"Griff Lomax, I have laboured to bring you into the straight way of faith. The Lord has delivered you; turn to the Lord and believe in Him."

The Rev. Abel Bell struck up the Doxology, obeying instinct rather than the prompting of reason. The little chapelful of people joined in with one voice, till the walls seemed to rock with the clashing waves of sound.

But Gabriel Hirst had fainted on the floor of the pulpit.

Quietly Griff moved down the aisle, and took his friend in his arms. He carried him into the vestry, and was sprinkling water over his face before the congregation was fairly alive to what had happened.

When the Doxology had been sung—and sung again—there began a great harvesting of souls. Few of those present could withstand the swift excitement of such a confession as

they had lately listened to. Never before had the Rev. Abel Bell witnessed so goodly a gathering in to the Lord.

When the fervour had subsided a little, and the time was at hand for an adjournment to the class-room, there to enroll the converted, Griff moved up to the pulpit and mounted the stair. He gave them a level narrative of what had happened at Whins Quarry, and he so over-rated Gabriel's cause for hate that his after-action showed excusable; he went further, moving warily step by step, till he had proved that any man, with manhood in him, must have acted as the preacher had done. And then, as he turned to go—

"Gabriel Hirst has bidden me thank God for my escape," he said. "I do thank God, from my whole heart fervently. Neighbours, we are going to forget what has passed to-night, remembering only that we have a man among us—a man to the tips of his fingers. And his name is Gabriel Hirst."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TALE FROM THE HEART OF THE NIGHT.

Lomax, feeling a sudden desire to stretch his legs, set off at five of an October afternoon to walk to Ludworth. His mother was staying at Gorsthwaite for a day or two, and there was no chance of Kate's feeling lonely if he were late in getting back. Though it was fine enough overhead when he set off, he found it heavy-going on the rutty old packroad, superseded long ago by the good hard road that leads past the stoups and Sorrowstones Spring. The rains had been heavy of late; already the clouds were thickening again as he gained Tinker's Pool, and not a trace of the moon was to be seen.

Repairing, sharp-set, to the White Swan for one of the solid meals which that hostelry affected, he chanced to meet a horse-dealer of his acquaintance in the bar; the dealer had a neat little bay for sale, and Griff was in need of another horse. It was agreed, finally, that the bay should be brought to Gorsthwaite the next morning for inspection, and Griff began to talk of starting off again. But a look out-of-doors made him think twice about it. The night showed black as pitch, and rain was coming down in bucketsful.

"You'll none be crossing the moor to-night, Mr. Lomax?" said the dealer, peering over his shoulder.

"I must, sometime; but it might be as well to wait a bit and see if it lifts. We'll have another drink, at any rate."

At the end of an hour or so the rain slackened pace, and the moon tried hard to elbow her way through the clouds. Griff, grown impatient of sitting in the musty bar-room, would hear of no more delay.

"My advice to you, sir, is—keep to the new road through Cranshaw; it'll be fearful dark the other way, and ankle-deep in water," was the dealer's parting injunction.

Griff decided to take his advice. The way was a good two miles further round, but it was better, on a night like this, to have solid ground underfoot. The sky cleared for awhile as he mounted the hill; ahead of him, shining white under the full moon, stood the first of the stoups. His thoughts went back to the father who had died on this very road—to the father whom he could barely remember, who yet had stood to him throughout life as a wonderful example of tenderness, strength, and devotion. He recalled how, when he was sixteen, he had heard an old scandal raked up, to the effect that this perfect father of his had brought old Mother Strangeways' daughter to shame; how he had leaped up, his face on fire, and knocked down the man who had thought it manly to sneer at the father in the son's presence; how he had gone straightway to his mother, and blurted out what had happened; how she had wept over him, and comforted him, and told him the whole truth of the matter.

He drew near to Sorrowstones Spring; so full had he been of the old-time sadness that he had scarcely noted the quick return of clouds and rain. A vivid lightning flash awakened him; hot-foot came the thunder in pursuit; from Cranshaw far ahead of him to Ludworth in his rear, the meeting of moor and sky seemed to be one rolling line of din. Then all was still, save for the rain, the cries of frightened grouse. He pushed on. Sorrowstones Spring was close on his left now. He could hear the wind swirling round the rickety chimney-stack.

On a sudden there came a cry that was neither of wind nor bird—a harsh, protracted wail that sliced through the tempest like a knife-stroke. No words could be heard—only that inarticulate wail—yet Lomax knew that blasphemy was abroad; he felt the skin creep on his scalp, and his sodden cap seemed to lift itself clean off his head. He came to a halt and listened; sweat and rain joined issue and rolled down his face; in all his life he had never, till now, known what real fear meant.

The wind and the rain grew quieter, the wailing louder. He traced it to the cottage, and, just because his legs would scarce carry him for fright, he forced himself to draw near.

"It was *her* daughter that was mixed up with father's name," he muttered, remembering on the sudden who it was that lived here.

He did not know whether it were sheer obstinacy that dragged him to the door, or the instinct to help a fellow-creature in need, or whether some overmastering ghostly force were at work; but he could not draw back now. He felt for the sneck of the door, found it after a moment's groping, and pushed his way into the cottage. For a moment he could see nothing for the peat-smoke; his eyes smarted, and the reek crept down to the bottom of his throat and set him coughing till he was hoarse. The wailing had ceased, but still the silence seemed pregnant with that sense of blasphemy. Gradually his vision cleared; he could see a farthing rushlight, almost burnt through, guttering in a dirty bottle-neck. Beyond the candle was a huddled heap of straw and blanket and human hair—something bright gleamed out from the tangled hair, something skinny and brown scratched up and down the blanket. Dazed as he was, it was some time before he grasped that this was Mother Strangeways, that the little bright circles were eyes, that the twitching object was her lean right hand. Swiftly his thoughts went back to that other hag who had pressed her lips to his just without Roddick's door. Could they be the same?—But he had little time for reflection. A crackling laugh came from the bed in the corner. Mother Strangeways was lifting herself to a sitting posture, and her shrivelled bosom showed through the tattered nightgown that made pretence of covering her.

"Griff Lummax—his father's son—an' he's come to shrive me i' th' latter end!" she mocked. "Hast 'a nowt to say for thyseln, lad? I war praying, a while back, to set een on thee afore I deed, an' th' devil he's answered my prayer, an' there tha stands as quiet as th' grave I'm bound for."

The old homely turns of speech helped to pull Griff

together. It was flesh and blood he had to deal with, at any rate, and that was so much to the good.

"I heard your cries as I was passing, and came in to help you. What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Do? Nowt, nowt, I say, save come a step or two nearer, so as I haven't to shout to mak myseln heärd. I'm sickening to my deäth, Griff Lummax, an' afore I fetched thee out o' th' dark an' th' storm, th' pain war fit to drive me crazy. But tha's come, lad, an' I'll dee happy yet. Step closer, I tell thee!"

He halved the distance between himself and the bed; nearer he could not force himself to go just yet.

"What do you want?" he muttered.

Mother Strangeways watched him warily. She worked her arms up and down, as if testing their strength; she measured the distance between them, as if she were bent on reaching him with her bony fist. The glitter in her eyes failed to a cunning softness, while the lines of her mouth grew hard.

"I can't talk loud, lad; bend ower me," she whispered.

He made himself come to the bedside, and stooped to hear what she had to say. In a twinkling her fingers were clawing at his throat. Death-ridden as she was, the old hatred gave the woman a nervous strength of grip. Half-strangled, Griff felt for her hands, and seized them, and forced them down.

"So that's your game, is it?" he laughed. "A pretty specimen of a dying woman you are, Mother Strangeways."

Just that touch of fight had strung up his nerves to their normal pitch.

She lay back on the bed, a little stream of red trickling from her mouth. Griff stood and watched her, not knowing what to say or do, until at last she spoke in a quavering voice.

"It war truth I spoke, Griff Lummax, when I said I war deeing. Another hour—a half-hour, mebbe—'ull see me ready for th' coffin. I tried to kill thee, then, lad, but tha worsted me. Tha'd best be going thy ways, an' leave me to it."

Surely, Griff thought, there was no pretence this time. The pallor on her face, with the bluish tint dusting it here and there,

could mean nothing short of death. How could he leave her there to wrestle with the end?

"Mother Strangeways," he said roughly, "I bear you no malice. What's done is done, and you must square the reckoning when you get to the other side. Can I ease the journey for you a bit?"

She turned over on her side and looked at the rushlight, which, like herself, was sputtering to an end. She pointed to the cupboard, then to the candle and back again. Griff, obeying her gesture, took a bundle of rushlights from the bottom shelf of the cupboard, lit one and rammed it tight in the bottle-neck.

"Ay," muttered the old woman, "that's th' tale, fro' generation to generation. Th' owd light dees, an' out it's chucked, an' in goes th' smooth-faced young un. An' it's little fowk think o' th' light that's gone, so only they've getten a fresh un to show 'em their way. But there's summat wrang, Griff Lummax—ay, grievous wrang—when th' young uns is ta'en first, an' th' owd uns fizzle on to th' last drop o' greäse. It's nigh on five an' thirty year sin' th' bonny lass went undersod; why warn't it me that war ta'en? Why warn't it me, I say?" she screamed. "Doan't come to me an' crack o' thy God A'mighty, what taks young lassies i' their prime an' leaves th' owd 'uns to rot i' their skins for grief an' worry."

She sank back, weak with the effort, and the ooze ran faster from her mouth. She lay quiet for awhile, but the workings of her face showed that she was thinking hard. And her thoughts were with the daughter who had died in childbirth—childbirth to a nameless father.

The memory roused her old set purpose, forgotten for the moment. The cunning came into her eyes again, and the twitching of her hands began afresh.

"I'm sooin gone," she said; "tha can keep me a two or three minutes longer, if tha will."

"Ay, that I will! What have I to do?"

"Wend to th' cupboard again. Tha'll find a green bottle there; fetch it."

Griff found the bottle, and put it into her hands.

"There's a little mug on th' table," she muttered.

He turned to get the mug, and Mother Strangeways, quick as a flash, brought the bottle down on his skull. It smashed into little bits, and a spirt of blood broke through Griff's close-cropped hair. The hag laughed, and hugged herself into her blankets.

"I've sworn to do for th' lot on ye, an' tha'll be wi' thy father sooin!" she croaked.

Griff retreated to the wall. He meant to see this play played through, but it was as well to take due precautions. The cut on his head was of no great depth, luckily, and the bleeding soon stopped.

"Mother Strangeways," he said, "you didn't count on a Lomax having a thick skull. That's where you made a mistake. It takes a bigger bottle than that to kill the old breed off."

Mother Strangeways had never been one to doubt fatality, and she gave up the fight. It was clear that Griff would outlive her. She lay on her back and cursed till the man grew cold with horror. Then she half rose and leaned on her elbow.

"May tha be cursed, Griff Lummax, till hell is too cold to hold thee; an' thy childer after thee, till hell-fire hes getten th' lot o' ye. Amen."

The fire was burning low, and Griff, anxious not to let uncanny notions get the better of him, turned his attention to replenishing it from the peat-stack in the corner opposite the bed; but all the while he kept the tail of one eye on the old woman's doings. Then he dropped into the solitary chair that the room possessed, and listened to the howling of the wind in the chimney-stack. Only Mother Strangeways' stertorous breathing broke the silence within.

"Griff Lummax," she called at last.

"Well?"

"I've a tale to tell thee."

"I'm listening."

"Tha minds how thy father war lost on Cranshaw Moor, mony a year back?"

"Ay, I mind it."

"That's what th' tale is about. Listen, lad; it's bonny telling. Five an' twenty year back come a neet like this as brought thee here. It blew, an' it blew, an' th' snaw war thick on th' grund i' place o' rain. I war sitting ower th' fire, thinking on th' daughter that war gone, an' ill-wishing th' man 'at hed killed her, when there comes a knock to th' door. I oppens it wide, an' who should stand on th' door-stun but th' man I'd been ill-wishing—Joshua Lummax, lad, thy father. He taks a two or three steps inside, and his eye cotches mine fair and square, same as if he'd bin as honest as he'd like fowk to think him. He'd crossed fro' Ludworth, seemingly, an' th' snaw war that thick 'at he couldn't tell which war th' highroad an' which war th' moor; he mun ha' been dazed wi' th' white, or he'd ha' known, seeing he'd getten so far, that he'd nobbut to keep on straight as iver his nose 'ud lead him. But he didn't know, an' he'd come to Mother Strangeways to leärn." She paused, laughing quietly. "*I leärned him*, lad. I set him straight into th' heart o' th' moor, an' I knew 'at he war sartin sure to walk into a bog or dee o' th' cold. Well, he missed th' bog, it 'ud seem, for they fund him stiff an' stark a two mile fro' th' cottage here. When I heärd th' news, I saw th' sun for th' first time sin' th' lass dee'd, an' '*One*,' says I to myseln; 'I'll bide th' Lord's gooid time for th' rest.' But I war ta'en wi' th' rheumatiz afore tha war rightly growed up, Griff, an' I could no ways get at thee, as I mud ha' done wi' health an' strength to help me. Eh, lad, lad, but I made fooil's play wi' my chances this neet! There's nowt I want on earth, nowt I pray for, but just to see thee an' thy mother ligging stiff an' stark one beside t' other."

Griff had risen, and stood dumbly watching the interlude which death allowed this sorry victim. He could not grasp it at first. His father's death seemed a topic of far-away interest; his mind had room only for the figure of this strenuous witch, with the candle-light glimmering on her eager, wasted face.

There was a long silence between them, until Mother Strangeways let a moan escape her. The pain was gripping her heart-strings now, but she had to say her say. On her face was the transfiguration that comes to any who fight with death, be they good or vile.

"Tha's nowt to say, lad? Tha stands there like a witless nat'ral, an' tha listens to th' tale I've getten to tell. Well, hod thy whisht for awhile; it 'ull be thy turn next."

She clapped one hand on her breast with a shriek; but the spasm passed, and she resumed her talk, Griff listening dizzily the while.

"I warn't allus like tha's known me. I war a God-fearing wife once, an' a mother 'at yearned to her babby. Mary war my first an' my last, an' it seemed 'at she'd ta'en all th' love I hed to gie. There war nowt but Mary i' my mind when I wakened i' th' morn, an' nowt but Mary at my heart when I coddled her up for th' neet. Then—tha knows th' rest; lad, can tha wonder 'at I sent thy father to his deäth?" she finished, half in fury, half in pleading.

Still Lomax could not grip the full meaning of the thing. He grew dreamily awake to the fact that some one was taking his father's name in vain, and he knew that he must defend him.

"Father never touched your girl," he said hoarsely. "Has it taken you all these years to learn the truth? Did you never see Captain Laverack hanging round your cottage, nor see the lust in his face? Laverack it was that led her wrong; he was a friend of father's till then, and he used to stay at the Manor. He left soon after—fled the country for awhile, because of other things he was mixed up with—and your girl put it all on father's shoulders, thinking to get help from him when the child was born."

The woman on the bed was following Griff closely.

"Laverack! Laverack!" she muttered, shutting her eyes. "Where hev I heärd th' name lately?"

"Laverack has come back to these parts and bought Frender's Folly," said Griff.

Mother Strangeways peered across the smoke reek.

"Come nearer, lad; I want to see thy een—nay, I'm ower far gone to try my pranks again," she added, seeing him hesitate.

He came close and she watched his eyes.

"Is't truth tha'rt speaking, Griff Lummax?"

"Truth? Ay, bitter truth."

"I believe thee. Thowts come thranging back now; I niver thowt to pitch on Laverack, for all th' lass war busy wi' his name while she lay a-child-bed. But I see it now, I see it now." She sprang up in bed and clutched him by the arm. "Griff, if tha's getten ony love for thy own mother, think on me; think what it meäns, lad, to lose a daughter an' see th' man what killed her go free. Kill him, Griff; he's not aboon three mile away this very minute, an' there's no snaw to stop thee. Run hot an' fast, an' tak him by t' throat, an' say Mother Strangeways sent ye."

She was growing delirious now. Still Griff could not throw off the full weight of his stupor. Instinctive stubbornness was his only ally.

"I won't," he said bluntly.

"Tha might ha' childer o' thy own, lad—bonny wenches 'at war biding th' time of a gooid man's coming; think what it meäns, an' if tha's getten ony bowels o' compassion, help a deeing woman to her rights."

"I won't, curse you!"

Her voice grew coaxing. Death might win her, to have and to hold, in a very few moments; but meanwhile the ruling passion would let her take no rest.

"I'm reckoned poor, Griff, because I lives i' a poor way. But wend to th' cupboard once again, an' tha'll find summat worth heving—summat bright an' gold, fastened up i' a worsted stocking. Tak it all, lad, if tha'll wend to Frender's Folly, an' do what mun be done."

At last Griff awoke to reality. He saw it all now. This woman on the bed had murdered his father; why was he dallying with justice? The hatred that had kept up Mother

Strangeways for close on five and thirty years, the quick lust for vengeance that had sent Joshua Lomax to his grave—they had Joshua's son in their grasp now. He made a step towards the bed, then stopped; between him and his father's murderess sounded the death-rattle in the woman's throat, driving him back, stunning him with a sense of some power beyond his ken.

The rushlight guttered in its stand. The shadows came out of their corners, and played with the ruddy glow from the peats. The wind sang for rain in the chimney-stack. As any frightened youngster might have done, Griff bent his head, and trembled before the majesty of Death, and sobbed for the littleness of his understanding.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE RIFT.

It was three of the morning when Griff got back to Gorsthwaite. Kate heard him push the key into the lock and was down in a moment.

"Griff, where have you been?"

"What! not asleep, wifey? It is against orders for you to be up at this time of night."

He reached out his arms for her into the dark, and found her, and stroked her tumbled hair, mutely thanking God that he had time to collect himself before she could see his face.

"I couldn't sleep, dear. I have been so nervous about everything of late, and I feared—I don't know what."

She cried a little then, for her nerves were highly strung nowadays, and the relief from a molehill of dread was commensurate with a mountainous terror.

"I know, Kate, I know. I will not take such long walks till you are well and strong again, and able to come with me."

"Why are we stopping out here? You are wet through. I built up a big fire in the parlour not long ago, thinking you would be cold and wet when you reached home."

His grasp tightened on her almost harshly.

"Do you mean that you came downstairs from your bed to look after my comfort?" he demanded. "Kate, you make me ashamed of myself."

"But I wasn't asleep, dear, and this dressing-gown is as warm as warm. Come and see what a beautiful blaze there is; I put on a heap of logs, as well as peat."

A ruddy glow welcomed them as they went in, and lit up

every wrinkle and furrow that the past night had brought into Griff's face—lit up, too, the clotted patch of hair around the place where Mother Strangeways had struck him with the bottle. Kate, seeing this, gave a little cry.

"Where have you been?" she repeated. "Griff, you haven't been out with the poachers again? You promised so faithfully."

"No, wife," he laughed, uneasily, "I have not been poaching. Don't worry about it; it is only just a bruise."

But Kate had made up her mind not to be put off.

"You *shall* tell me. Do you think I'm a baby, Griff, that I must needs have everything unpleasant kept from me?"

"You know where old Mother Strangeways' cottage is? I passed it on my way back to-night, and heard cries from within. I went in and found her dying. That is why I was so late in getting home. I had to slip across to Marshcotes for the doctor before coming on here."

"Yes, but the cut on your head?" persisted Kate.

"She hated me for some reason or other, and threw a bottle at me. That is all. Tut, child, the woman is dead; it is too late to tremble for what she might have done. Now, off you run to bed, while I go and change these wet things. I won't waste your fine blaze, Katey, but I'll read for an hour or so and have a whisky hot."

"Can't I stay with you, dear? I don't want to sleep a bit, and——"

"No, you can't! Off with you; I'm too tired to carry you upstairs by main force."

She kissed him good night. Just as she was going Griff called her back.

"Don't say anything about this to the mother, will you? It would only bother her."

"No, not a word, if you had rather I didn't.—Mother is not well, Griff; I wish she would have the doctor."

"She will have the doctor, Kate, when she is too weak to forbid him to cross the threshold," laughed Griff. "Nothing serious, is it?"

"I don't think so. Only, she seemed rather feverish to-night when she went to bed. I made her drink some black-currant tea."

"Poor old lady! She'll be well by morning, never fear, lest you should give her another dose."

But the old lady was far from well on the morrow, and Griff began to grow anxious. At the end of the day he would hear of no refusal, but set off on Lassie to fetch the doctor from Marshcotes. The doctor pronounced it a case of pleurisy, and anticipated no great danger so far as the patient's present condition went.

"She will get wet through, that mother of yours, and go about afterwards without changing. You're an obstinate lot, you Lomaxes, and why you haven't died out long ago as a race, passes my wits."

The old doctor had known Griff's father, and he exercised his privilege as a friend of the family to grumble on the slightest pretext.

"Carelessness toughens people, if they begin early enough. It is coddling that sends up the death-rate," laughed Griff.

"Nonsense! There's a mean in all things. Only the other day I called to see a patient down in the village, and there was your mother, reading away by the fire as if her clothes were not filling the room with steam. She had been out for a walk in the rain, she told me, and hadn't had time to change. Well, now she has time to be ill. I wish you good day, young man. You're an obstinate lot."

Mrs. Lomax weathered her illness so easily that she thought lightly of it, and fumed at the ridiculous fuss they were making about her convalescence. One morning she announced her intention of going out; the October sun shone temptingly over the heather, and there was a fresh breeze blowing.

"Not for another week, mother," pleaded Griff, "you know what the doctor said."

"Fiddlesticks, Griff! Because he's an old woman himself, he likes to think I am one, too. But I'm not. Out I go this morning, to get the cobwebs blown away."

Griff argued, entreated, and finally went out to the farm-buildings in the rear, thinking that his mother had given up the idea. Whereupon Mrs. Lomax, smiling like a truant child, crept upstairs, past the room where Kate was reading away the two hours' rest enjoined on her each morning, put on her bonnet and cloak, and stepped out into the moor with a rather feeble imitation of her old swinging gait. She returned at the end of an hour, feeling more tired than she would admit, and she laughed at Griff's face of concern when she confessed to her escapade.

That night she was worse, and by the morning all the old symptoms had set in with renewed vigour. But she was persistent in her assertion that going out had nothing whatever to do with the relapse; she even went so far as to hint that her yesterday's walk in the fresh air had given her a better chance to grapple with the enemy.

A couple of days later Griff rode to Saxilton for one or two sick-room necessaries which could not be got in Marshcotes. When he returned Kate met him in the hall. Her eyes were red, and her voice uncertain.

"Mother has been asking for you ever since the doctor left. Will you go up at once?"

"Is she worse?" asked Griff, a sudden fear seizing him.

For answer she burst into tears, and Griff went sadly up the stairs. The old lady stretched out her hand to him eagerly. He sat down on the edge of the bed and took both hands in his; he was shocked to notice the rapid change for the worse in her since he left.

"I have wanted you, Griff. They told me you had gone to Saxilton to buy me some things. You always have taken a great deal of trouble on my account. But I wish you hadn't gone to Saxilton. I shall not need what you brought."

"It was no trouble, dear. Why do you—mother, why do you speak in that tone about—not needing——?"

"Because I am going to die," said the old lady, quietly.

"Mother, mother, not that!"

"Yes, Griff. The doctor did not say it in so many

words, but my eyes are sharp. I never did pay much attention to people's words—especially a doctor's. But I watched his face when he thought I was not looking, and it said, as plain as could be, 'You will die.' So there's an end of it, Griff."

"What do we care about his opinion? Tell yourself you will live, little mother; there's fight in you yet."

"Very little, now. I have done; the doctor only clinched what I felt in myself—otherwise, of course, I should not have believed him."

"Mother, you won't die!" cried Griff, at a loss to meet this quiet acceptance of the inevitable. It seemed so foreign to all the sick woman's characteristics.

She looked at him with a whimsical, half-pathetic smile. "Don't try to fool me, Griff; you should know how I hate it. Do you think I am afraid?"

He made no answer, only pressed her hands a little closer in his own. After a long silence she spoke again, in a soft, measured voice.

"I think people make far too much of dying, and the dread of facing the Unknown. I am sorry to leave you, and I would stay if any effort could keep me here; but I fear nothing. Perhaps I *hope* more than my life has given me any right to do. I never understood religion, Griff, and I went my own way through everything, and I believe I have been a very selfish, bad old woman."

"Mother——"

"Boy, I never would have you flatter me, and I don't mean to now. How did you find Kate?"

"Well enough—quite well, dear. Don't worry about her."

"She will fret about me a good deal. Be very careful of her, Griff; there are not many women in the world I should admit to be worthy of you. You see what a foolish mother I am."

Griff did not understand how it came about, but his tears were pouring fast on to the thin old hands. The mother ruffled away the hair from his forehead, and comforted him with a

hundred soothing gestures, laid aside long ago with the end of his childhood. The dying strove to calm the living.

"Come, dear, come. I am an old woman, and I had to go some time. Don't fret so about it. I have had a good life, and you have been a good son to me, Griff. We might almost have been lovers, you and I, from the way we behaved at times."

She fell into a reverie, a little smile flitting now and then across her lips as she recalled this or that pleasant memory. And Griff went softly from the bedside; he could not bear up against the pathos of it all. But she heard his footfall, faint as it was, and called him back.

"Only a word, dear, and then you can leave me to sleep. The end won't be just yet, I think; you can come back for the good-bye. It is about the child. Don't be too fearful about it; don't hedge it round with carefulness, and shut out the fresh air from it. Kate will know what I mean when it comes. A baby, Griff—one's own baby—seems so wonderful, and frail, and precious, till one gets used to it. You must fight that down, and try to believe it will grow without being shut up in a glass case." She laughed, and her sharp old eyes fastened themselves on Griff with a touch of roguishness in them. "If any one asks how I died, boy, tell them that I died as I lived —trying to teach you good common sense. And—yes, tell them this, too—I died glad of my life, and proud of the grand old stock. You have the Lomax pride in you, marrow-deep: cling to it, Griff, and pass it on to your children."

A week later Griff stood in the wind-swept graveyard at Marshcotes. A bitter, roving gale chased the fallen leaves in and out among the tombstones. The parson droned his "ashes to ashes, dust to dust," but the sexton's scattered handful of earth was forestalled by the rattle of hail upon the coffin-lid. The moor would have none of man's tawdry symbols; it loved the dead too well.

And Griff took heart from the blustering weather. As of old, the heath was one with him in sympathy, and mourned, in its own wild way, for the fearless woman who was gone.

The old doctor passed an arm through his as he turned towards Gorsthwaite.

"I will go with you, Griff, if you'll let me. I have not seen your wife to-day."

Neither spoke till they were well out on the moor. Griff, striving hard to look ahead, not backward, began to talk of Kate.

"She is not strong, doctor, and this has been a sad blow to her. What are her chances?"

The doctor glanced at him nervously, and fumbled with the buttons of his great-coat.

"Oh, good enough, good enough! She'll pull through all right. It's not for a good while yet, you know, and there is time to get over all this before then."

"You sound shifty," said Lomax, curtly; "do you mean there is danger?"

"Well—we shall all of us have to be careful. She is not strong—never has been since the first year of her marriage. I have attended her off and on since she was a child. The healthiest woman I ever saw till she married. Her weakness is all owing to that brute Strangeways; he led her a dog's life for years."

They went on for another half-mile, till the doctor, anxious to turn his companion's attention from his troubles, struck off into another topic.

"By the way, talking of Strangeways, do you remember the night, not long ago, when you knocked me up to go to Sorrowstones Spring? Phew, it was a night, too! I blessed you pretty heartily on the way. The old hag was dead as a doornail, and she might have waited for me till the morning without a touch of impatience. Joe, I fancy, is of the same breed; he has taken up his quarters in the maternal cottage."

"What is he doing?" asked Griff, more from a feeling that he had to say something than from any interest in the answer.

"What has he been doing for years past? Drink, drink, only more now than of old. He has failed in his quarry business, and they say he hasn't a penny in the world. Well, well,

let him pass; he's a fine object-lesson for those who believe in the inherent worth of the animal man. Cross between a gentleman-rake and a woman of the soil—a bad cross always—children inherit worst of both sides. Heigho! Here we are at Gorsthwaite. Now, mind that you pull yourself well together, Griff. Your wife wants no molygrubs from you, let me tell you; she will manufacture enough and to spare for herself. Oh, and another thing. I don't know whether you think of moving into the Manor soon. You had better not, till your wife is strong again. The moving would only worry her."

But old Jose Binns, milking his cows in the mistal that same evening, nodded his head sagely, and a dour look was on his face.

"I said 'at there'd no gooid come on it, an' there's war i' th' making. No gooid could ha' come on it, choose how a mon looks at it."

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW THEY FOUGHT ROUND THE PEAT-RICK.

For generations past Gorsthwaite Moor had been a meeting place for gamblers from the little manufacturing towns that encroached on the furthest limits of the heath. Town-bred they were, for the most part, stunted and sickly-bodied; they spoke the uncouth, hybrid Yorkshire of the streets, not the rich Doric of the moor-folk. But here and there you would find moor-reared men among them, a poacher may be, or one of the fast-dying race of moor-squireens. The police knew well enough that never a fine Sunday went by without adding its quota to the countless games of pitch-and-toss that had already been played on the moor; they had known it for years past, but had never been able to make a successful raid. The moor ran down sharply to the valley on every side, and outposts stationed at the edges could command every way of access, recognized or otherwise, to their open-air gambling haunt. Periodically the detectives pitted their ingenuity against that of the gamblers, and periodically they found, on reaching the middle of Gorsthwaite Moor, an innocent company of working-men, engaged in no more illegal occupation than the smoking of very black clay pipes. The pickets knew their business far too well to admit of surprises; their rule was, to pass the one word "stranger" to their comrades, whenever an unknown figure appeared below; no matter if the figure were that of a woman or child—the word was passed along just the same, and operations were suspended until the intruder had got out of sight.

Treachery among their number was the only thing they had to fear, and it was a standing wonder to Griff—who made himself free of every out-of-the-way society afforded by the moors —that none of them had ever sold their secret.

Joe Strangeways, whenever he was not employing his Sabbath in getting most royally drunk at the Bull, was sure to be found at the meetings on Gorsthwaite moor; and on the Sunday following Lomax's fight with the preacher at the edge of Whins Quarry, it fell to Joe's lot to guard the approach to the moor on the side overlooking Gorsthwaite Hall. Involuntarily his eyes took stock of his enemy's house; the day was clear and bright, and he could see the smoke curling up from the Hall chimneys, as if the mile that lay between were but a few score yards. The quarryman's heart was still sore within him; he would not let himself forget how Griff Lomax had filched his wife from him; he remembered that he had sworn vengeance on him, and that his only steps in this direction, up to the present, had given Lomax exactly the thing he most wanted.

"If only I warn't so dull-witted like," muttered Joe, "I might think o' summat. But the beer doan't seem to help a chap, an' my fine gen'leman ower yonder, what plays at running a farm an' reckons to be fine an' condescending to us plain-natured devils, smiles i' my face fro' nooin to neet. I've thowt, whiles, o' waiting on th' moor for him after dark, an' spoiling his pretty mug wi' th' heft of a good stout crowbar; but a mon hes to keep sober for that sort o' game—an' he's ower big, ony way ye tak him."

He paused in the midst of his reflections to watch a black dot on the landscape. The dot grew bigger, and moved in a bee-line between Gorsthwaite Hall and himself. Soon he could see that it was a man's figure, and presently he recognized Lomax. A sudden inspiration ran athwart Joe Strangeways' muddled brain. He rammed his pipe hard into the left corner of his mouth, thrust both hands deep into his pockets, and gave a prolonged growl of satisfaction. Then he slouched across the heather to where his companions were gaming.

"Well, Joe?" said a little man, with a red nose and ferret eyes, who had the air of being in some sort a leader among them. "What art 'a coming away for now? Tha's not watched thy time."

"I've come, Dave Jefferson, to tell ye there's one on th' way ye'll noan be ower glad to see," said the quarrymaster, slowly.

The pence and the halfpence disappeared like magic. An air that refuted suspicion crept over the faces of all present.

"Then why didn't tha pass t' word, yer lumbering fool?" said the little man, whose temper was altogether disproportionate to his size. "Mebbe tha'd like to go round by Thornborough town t' next time, an' come to tell us an hour or two after t' magistrates have given us the straight tip for gaol?"

Joe squirted his tobacco-quid, with careless accuracy, at a bumble-bee that was sipping the heather in front of him.

"If tha thowt twice afore tha spoke, Dave, tha'd be a likelier lad; an' happen tha'd be likelier still if tha never spoke at all. It's noan a stranger 'at's coming; it's a chap ye think a powerful deal on, some on ye."

"An' who may that be, Mr. Strangeways?" queried Jefferson, ironically. "Tha'rt grown mighty sharp all on a sudden; for it takes a more nor ordinary sharp feller to fool Dave Jefferson."

"That's as may be. It's Griff Lummax that's creeping, sly as a fox, up th' hillside."

Three of the poaching set that foregathered at the Dog and Grouse were on the moor that afternoon, and Jack o' Ling Crag spoke up for his absent friend.

"If that's all tha hes to tell us, Joe, tha mud as weel gang back th' way tha came. He's a proper set up chap, is Mr. Lummax, an' it's noan his breed that peaches on a mate."

"Oh, ay, he's a grand un!" echoed Joe, with beery derision. "He prigged my wife, he did; an' a man that 'ull do that, 'ull do owt."

"He did thy wife a sarvice, anyhow, I'm thinking," snapped Will Reddiough.

They all laughed at that, and their laughter braced up Joe's wits to further effort.

"Well, seeing's believing," he muttered.

"Eh? Speak out, mon, if tha's getten owt to say."

The little group was pressing close about him now; the sulkiness of his tones seemed to give added weight to his innuendo.

"I war passing th' Bull one neet a while back——" began Joe.

"Nay, lad, nay," put in Jack o' Ling Crag, with a mellow chuckle. "*Passing*, did'st say? It's not oftens *tha* passes by a public, Joe."

"An' I thowt as I'd turn in for a glass o' bitter," went on the quarrymaster, doggedly, not heeding the interruption. "There war no one i' th' back room, an' I stood waiting i' th' passage till somebody should come to sarve me. I heärd voices i' th' front bar, an' I fell to listening to 'em. One war Griff Lummax's, an' he war agate wi' telling all about these here sprees up o' Gorsthet Moor. I crept a-tip-toe an' peeped in at th' door; an' I see'd 'at t' other chap war a police inspector. Well, Lummax, he said as how he hed fooiled th' lot on ye, an' that it 'ud be an easy job to land ye all i' quad. Is that enow for ye, or mun I wend back th' way I came, an' say niver a word to this Lummax chap?"

The poaching trio was silent, and the rest looked ominously black.

"Is this gospel truth?" said Jefferson, at last.

"Gospel truth, so help me God!" Joe answered.

Griff Lomax, meanwhile, had topped the rise, and was sauntering easily towards them. They watched him cross the two hundred yards of heather that divided them; they listened to his cheery "Good-day," but answered never a word. He felt that there was trouble in the air.

"What the deuce is the matter with you all? Do you think I'm a spy, or what?" he laughed.

That emphasizing of what lay uppermost in the mind of each was an unlucky move for Griff.

"Mebbe that's about the size of it," growled Jefferson.

Lomax paused awhile. Then—

"What's all this nonsense about?" he demanded sharply.

Jefferson, in his turn, halted before speaking.

"Joe Strangeways slipped into t' Bull, Mr. Lomax, a neet or two back, without your hearing him. Ye'd best hearken to what he has to say."

"I will. Speak up, Strangeways."

Joe shifted under his enemy's steady gaze. Then, with his eyes on the ground, he repeated his story. Every one watched Griff's face.

"Well," said Jefferson, "what have ye to say to yon?"

"Say? That it is a damned lie!" retorted Lomax, coolly.

"Are ye for denying that t' inspector chap war wi' ye in t' Bull that night?"

"He was."

The three poachers crept a little apart; they were loth to hear young Lomax condemn himself so openly.

"Then what have ye to say for yourseln?"

Griff, once he was roused, was stubborn as a mule. He kicked against little Jefferson's domineering tone, and he resented the facile way in which these comrades of his had given their verdict against him at a word from a man like Strangeways.

"Nothing; I've nothing to say," he repeated. "There's plenty that I could say, but nothing that I will; so put that in your pipe, Dave Jefferson, and smoke it till you're sick."

A low murmur rose from the company—only the poachers were silent.

"That means fighting, I fancy," said Lomax, after another long pause. "There are twenty-two of you, so far as I can count, and that's rather long odds. But it happens that you have three sound men amongst you." He stopped to look the three poachers square between the eyes. "You, Will Reddiough—and you, Jack o' Ling Crag—and you, Ned Kershaw—you'll all take an honest man's word against a cur's like Strangeways here. Have I dealt fair by you in the past?"

Those three purloiners of their neighbours' game warmed to the man's pluck.

"Ay, that ye hev, Mr. Lummax."

"I tell you this is all a lie, and I'll prove it when we've had a taste of good hard blows. Come over here, you three, and we'll fight the lot of them. They're a weakly crew at best, and they ought never to show themselves on a moor."

They hung irresolute for a second or two. Then their love of Griff, right or wrong, their instinctive response to his appeal against town-bred folk, above all, their zest for adventure, settled the question. They crossed to Griff's side, and the nineteen gamesters felt slightly less eager for the fray than they had been a moment ago. Lomax took advantage of their hesitation to throw a rapid glance about him: he saw, not ten yards on his left, the peat-rick which he had built up a few days ago, and which his farm-man was to cart away at the end of the week; and he framed his plan of action on the spot.

"Come with me," he cried. "You have sticks, all of you; so have I. Take a side a-piece of that peat-rick, and I'll look after the front. *And hit hard:* we have our work cut out."

The hesitation in the enemy's camp was over. No sooner had Griff and his three allies set their backs to the peats, than they were in the thick of it. Most of the nineteen had sticks, and the rest came on with their fists, trusting to run in under guard. *Thwack, thwack, thwack* sounded Griff's heart-of-oak on three separate skulls, and he was left free for a breathing space.

"How goes it behind?" he called, with a laugh that had the true fighting ring in it.

"Fine, sir, fine," answered Will Reddiough, in between two resounding blows; and "Beautiful!" cried Jack o' Ling Crag, with his big mouth all a-grin and his crisp grey hair on end with excitement.

Sixteen of the attacking party fell back in disorder; the other three were left on the ground as a barricade for Lomax. A second wild rush, in the middle of which Griff could make out the master-quarryman's square-set figure, and a naked knife-blade in his hairy red hands. Strangeways jumped with a yell

on the three prostrate bodies, and his blade caught a dancing sun-shaft as he drew it back to strike. Quick almost as the sun-shaft itself, Griff's stick went out, and took the knife, and whirled it high up in the air. The stick made another circuit, and the barricade was increased to the number of four. But it was his last stroke. Jefferson, close behind Joe Strangeways, took Griff neatly between the eyes, and down he went like a log on top of the other four. A wild yell came from those in Jefferson's rear, but Will Reddiough and the rest had their hands too full to be able to glance behind them. Strangeways grunted a curse, and picked up himself and his knife from the heather.

"By Hell, I'll settle accounts between us!" he muttered.

Gabriel Hirst felt his sins weigh heavily on him that afternoon. He had gone up the stream-side to the miller's, but had turned before coming in sight of the house. The deep hollow of the sky seemed, as of old, to be full of God's vengeance: as of old, the vengeance was all for him—for him, the chiefest of sinners. He had striven to murder his friend; save for that accident of the tree, he was at this moment a murderer; how dare he draw near to Greta—beautiful Greta, warm, human, all-sufficing—with the brand of Cain on his brow? He cursed himself for ever telling his love. He turned every single act, every thought and desire of his life, into blackest sins, with all his old-time ingenuity. He saw—physically saw—a Devil with flaming eyes, who stood in his path and mocked him on to the wrestling for which his arms were no longer strong. He leaped up the hillside, with the pauseless spring of the hunted, and went out on the moors to pay his full tribute of remorse. For Gabriel Hirst was a man who could be well trusted to ensure his own punishment.

"'Behold, I was shapen in wickedness: and in sin hath my mother conceived me,'" he wailed at last.

He had travelled far across the moor, and his strength was spent, and the tears were running apace down his hollowed cheeks.

The sound of shouting came from near at hand. He lifted his face, that showed pitiful as a child's, and looked across the gorse. He saw four men with their backs to a peat-rick, and a crowd of others rushing to the attack. He heard the rattle of sticks, and a clear, wild laugh that could come from none but Griff. The childishness smoothed itself out of his face, and his mouth grew firm. He forgot that he was a miserable sinner, forgot that he had been like to drop with weariness, forgot everything in earth or sky, except the rain of body-blows. The old moor-blood, swift and hot, was awakened; not for nothing had his forebears, like Griff's own, been reared through long centuries on the peaty uplands. He ran towards the peat-rick, and as he ran he found time to think that now he could wipe out that blood-stain once for all: Griff Lomax, his friend, was fighting against odds up there, and he would save him. Another flash, and he saw that God had given him one more clear chance, that the Almighty had stooped to work directly on his behalf. So, with a jumble of sheer fighting instinct, a sense of God's personal intervention, and an itch for the squaring of accounts, he rushed into the thick of it; but the moor instinct was uppermost.

Strangeways had his knife a shade too close to his enemy's heart, and Griff could not move a muscle to defend himself. But Strangeways got no further: he felt a pair of big, vice-like hands at his throat, and he thought his time was come. The preacher flung him back, half strangled, and picked up a stick lying at his feet, and laid about him merrily. They fell like acorns in a gale, till Gabriel Hirst shouted to Reddiough and the rest to leave their peat-rick. They rushed forward elbow to elbow, and those who were left of the nineteen broke and fled, crying for quarter. Then Gabriel Hirst cried, "Stop!" And the three poachers and the one man of God looked into each other's faces, and gripped each other's hands, and went to see what was amiss with their fallen comrade.

Lomax was sitting up on his elbow by this time.

"What is it, old fellow?" asked the preacher, fondling his hand in a silly, motherly way.

"A bit dazed—nothing at all—have we licked the beggars?"

"Licked 'em all to fits, sir; an' a grand fight it war," spoke up Will Reddiough.

Griff laughed at that, and got on to his feet. His victims had, one by one, done the same; for Griff's blows were hard, but their skulls were harder still. Then, after awhile, the defeated band came slinking back in twos and threes, and Lomax leaned against the peat-rick while he said his say.

"I *have* something to tell you now. First of all, my best thanks for as merry a picnic as I am likely to have for many a long day to come. You're not a bad lot, take you all in all, but you can't make up your minds quick enough, and you get hit while you're thinking. Next, Joe Strangeways—he's not here, by the way—Joe Strangeways was quite right about my being in the Bull with the stranger, and I've no doubt he listened at the keyhole. The stranger had got a notion into his head that I knew a good deal about these pleasant Sunday afternoons on the moor, and he came to Marshcotes expressly to pump me. Well, I told him a lot—but it was all wrong, every word of it. I put him as far off the track as I could, and I set him homewards with a glass of good Scotch whisky inside him. Now, do you believe me, or don't you?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RIFT GAPES WIDE.

JANUARY was here, and the frost had long ago set a sharp finger and thumb on the world. The grouse were visibly tamer than they had been a week ago; the peewits came nearer to farmsteads at the lowest point of their wheeling flight; the smaller feathered fry looked more than ever like desolate waifs and strays, as they fluttered from patch to frozen patch, above the whitened heather. So keen was the air that at Gorsthwaite could be heard the busy clatter of the quarry which hugged the Ling Crag end of Marshcotes Moor.

At eleven of a Wednesday morning, Griff was being soundly rated by his wife's nurse, a slim little energetic body who had seen to the bringing of too many infants into the world to feel much reverence for useless males.

"Mr. Lomax, I wish you'd go somewhere out-of-doors and stay there, that I do. Here you be, upstairs and down; now listening at the door, and popping out at me like a firebrand whenever I leave her room, to ask if there's any change for the worse; now tramping about the floor downstairs, till a body would think you'd fair set your mind on making the most noise you could."

"I—I didn't know you could hear me," said Griff, meekly. "I took my boots off, but the boards are all old and crazy. I must sit down, I suppose."

"Sit down? Nay, that you never will! As well ask you to sit on a hornet's nest as a chair, in your present feckless state. The only chance for us is to bundle you out-of-doors. I'd do it myself if I was a bit bigger. Dear, dear! it's a puzzle

to me to know how the first man could grow a rib decent enough to make a woman out of. Such poor, shiftless mortals as you are—cannot sit still a minute—unless there happens to be real work for you to do——"

"I'll put on my hat, I think," murmured Griff, swept towards the door by the speed of the little woman's utterances.

When he got out-of-doors, and had time to collect his thoughts, he remembered that Gabriel Hirst was to be married that morning. He had been anxious to put in an appearance and give his friend a good handshake at the chapel door, but Kate's illness had driven the matter clean out of his mind. He set off now by the short cut to Ling Crag, past Smithbank and the foot of Hazel Dene.

The village was all astir, and he found the little chapel full to the doors when he reached it. They made way for him instinctively, partly from sympathy with his recent trouble, partly through a feeling that the preacher's best friend ought not to have to stand outside the door while his marriage-service was being read. The ceremony was half through when Griff finally squeezed himself into a corner at the back of the chapel. A flood of confused thoughts came to him, dizzying his brain—remembrance of the time when he had stood at the altar with Kate—his mother's death—the ever-present anxiety about his wife.

It was over at last. Griff hurried forward, and took a hand of each as they came out on to the prim little pavement of the chapel graveyard.

"Good luck to you both," he murmured.

"We owe it to you a good deal, I fancy," said Greta, with pretty friendliness.

"That we do!" cried the preacher. "If it hadn't been for the quarrel, Griff, I should never have found heart to ask Greta to marry me. And if it hadn't been for the fight round the peat-stack, I should never have known what it was to feel the use of my arms. Man, it was worth living for, that fight!"

"That is not nice of you, Gabriel," laughed the girl, softly; "you have something more important to live for now."

But it was clear that she was far from disapproving of this new phase in her husband's character.

"We shall make a Pagan of you yet, old fellow. Good-bye, good-bye." And Griff, with many final handshakes, was off across the moor to Gorsthwaite, running hard in his anxiety to hear the latest news of Kate.

The doctor was coming down the stairs as Griff opened the front door.

"Well?" he cried, forgetting altogether, in his eagerness, to regulate his voice properly.

The old doctor had been present at such scenes often enough, but he had never felt an equal desire to turn tail and give necessity the slip. He took out his handkerchief and blew his nose; then he fidgeted with the buttons of his rough tweed coat—thinking all the while that it would have been a trifle easier in the telling if he had had the pluck to give Griff a plainer hint months ago. Finally, he looked up with a kind of desperation in his eyes.

"Your wife is dead," he answered, in a harsh, grating voice.

Griff put his hand to his forehead and stood there for a moment; the blood rushed to his face, and ebbed away again, as quickly as if some one had struck him.

"Wait a moment, doctor," he said, after a while; "do you know just what that means? You ought to be very sure——"

"She is dead, Griff; I'm not going to lie to you."

Not a word said Griff, but set his feet on the stairs, and began to mount them slowly. The doctor followed, put a hand on his shoulder, and led him down again to the hall.

"Not just yet, lad. When people die in great pain, it is not good to—can you understand me?—I want you to say good-bye to a calm face, Griff."

"Yes, yes. She was very beautiful, doctor, wasn't she? Too beautiful, I fancy; I should have reckoned on that."

His dull, passionless voice jarred on the old man terribly.

"See, lad, you must pull yourself together. The child is alive; keep up heart for the bairn's sake."

"The child? What do I want with the child? It is Kate I want."

"A boy, too—you always wanted a boy, you know," went on the other, not heeding Griff's fretful interruption.

The door stood open, and Griff, looking out across the moor, saw the crimson sun sinking into a grey bank of haze.

"We shall have snow to-night," he said, and glanced at the doctor as if prepared to meet dissent with argument.

"Yes, I fancy we shall—a heavy fall, too."

Griff straightened his shoulders presently, and held out his hand.

"You've done your best, doctor, and I thank you for it. I can't get used to the idea just at once; perhaps—if you left me to think it out a bit—I might get the hang of things better."

"God forgive me!" muttered the doctor, as he went out; "it is only staving off utter hopelessness for the lad. The child is as good as dead; it may live a day or two—a week, perhaps—it would have been better if it had never lived at all. Lord, Lord, what a mess life makes of itself!"

Without, Gorsthwaite showed itself in touch with the black weather. A sullen frost had hold of the land, and the stained old walls answered the sky with frown for frown. The plover wheeled ceaselessly about the chimney-stacks, and the voice of the damned rang dryly through their sable throats.

Within, the rooms were darkened, and the oaken panels creaked at the burden of their own sad thoughts. The mistress had been taken to her rest, and the master was battling for his reason, with a face that aped the stones which shut him in. All that he had in him of dogged resistance was pushing its way to the front: one blow had followed another, and the end, perhaps, was not yet—but he would fight till his own end came.

He got up from the bed where she had died, and moved stiffly up and down the room. He thought of the child, and forced himself to recall, one by one, the goodly plans he had framed for him. Yes, he should grow up strong—a Lomax to the backbone—he should take his fill of life, and help his father

to live again in watching him. Steady! The boy would have need of his father, as his father had of him: there must be no knuckling under to circumstance now.

On a sudden the child began to cry most piteously, disturbing his father's gaining resolution. Griff's thoughts wandered out again to that ice-bound moorland graveyard, where Kate was lying in the cold. It was surely a monstrous unfairness that she had died to give the boy his taste of life—that she must evermore lie naked and friendless, while he would some day eat and drink in the lusty fulness of his manhood.

But where did such thoughts carry him? Into the tangled places of shade, where neither hope nor light could show themselves. He fought them back, time after time, and slowly won his way to calm. By sheer strength of will he set his baby on the heights where its mother had had her dwelling, and fell down and worshipped the rising dawn now that the older day had set.

And all the while, the child within sent up its piteous cries. And all the while, the plovers, wheeling round the chimney-stacks, ceased not to wail, and screech, and whimper. And night settled dumbly over the silent heather places.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JANET.

THEY talk yet of that winter in Marshcotes parish. Some recall it for its twelve weeks of frost, others for the depth of snow that covered all but the tallest tombstones in the cemetery for a week and a day; but one and all remember the bitter night that heralded the storm, because of a deed which the snow did its best to hide.

At four of the afternoon the sun went down behind the surly spur of moor that guarded the western side of Frender's Folly. A black frost had made iron of the marshy ground, and glass of the sullen lake. All was bitter and dark, and the Folly walls seemed one with the gloom about them. The sky was a dead, expressionless grey. Then, on a sudden, yellowish banks of cloud crept up from the moor-edge, as though puffed by a noiseless wind. The grouse ceased their complaining, the curlews dropped earthward. One by one the snowflakes floated out of the cheerless sky, like tears from a frozen heart; one by one they clung to the heather sprays, blackening their murky green by contrast, or nestled in he clefts of their stalks. And every flake might have bee n a ghost, so subtle and lonely and sad was its wandering fall. White of snow, black of night—there was nothing over all the moor but these.

The guests at the Folly, while they were dressing for dinner, peeped out from under their blinds and saw the snowflakes silting against the window-panes. They shrugged their shoulders at the lunacy that had brought them here in winter weather, and went downstairs resolved to make the best of a

bad business. Laverack, feeling that he would have much to answer for if the snow should fasten them up in the house, exerted himself to keep the ball rolling. Laughter and jest increased apace, till Janet, facing her father from the opposite end of the table, thought she must surely go mad. Her mind was made up, and she feared lest the storm should render it impossible to cross the moor that night—feared lest some cause from within should detain her—feared, finally, lest the dinner should never end.

When they had gained the drawing-room, and the men below had grown noisily insistent on their freedom, Janet slipped to the side of the lady-companion who helped her to do the honours of the house.

"Look after these people, will you?" she said. "I have an atrocious headache, and I can't bear their foolishness."

"Really, my dear, you sound quite vindictive. I am sorry you are so unwell; shall I send your maid up with some tea?"

"Please don't. I would rather be left alone till to-morrow; talk and fuss jar on me so when I am like this. You will explain to every one? I mean to slip away quietly."

A moment later she was speeding along the corridor that led to her bedroom. She panted with excitement, with dread of frustration at this eleventh hour; but her mouth was firm, and her eyes resolute.

"What it is to have to lie! I *hate* it," she muttered. "Only, I had to. What will Leo say, even if I do reach him safely?" she added, with a disturbed wrinkling of her forehead.

She put on a cloak, and drew the pretty frilled hood over her head; then waited till she heard the men come up, and the drawing-room door close on the last of them. She went softly out by the side door, cutting short the growl of a chained-up mastiff by telling him who she was. Then across the whitened lawn, and up the rise till the open moor was gained —a slender, girlish figure, flitting shadow-like amongst the silent flakes. Her heart failed her as she reached the top; she seemed to be the sport of the storm-elves, and there was no living thing to help her to battle with the loneliness. She tried

to sing, that so she might trick herself into the thought that she had company; but her voice was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and it sank affrighted by its own power to people the stillness with re-echoing cries. Her knees shook under her, and the bridle track showed dimly—more dimly, it seemed, with each succeeding step. Not till now had she understood what was meant by her foolhardy resolve to cross the five miles of desolation that lay between herself and Wynyates.

At the end of a mile, just after she had turned into the cart-road that ran past Lawfoot Water, she clashed against some one walking in the opposite direction.

"Beg pardon," said a gruff voice. "I didn't fancy there'd be more nor one fooil abroad to-neet."

At any other time the girl would have been frightened out of her senses; but the voice rang honest, and any human company was better than that awful silence which had gone before.

"Stay!" she cried, as the stranger was about to pass on. "Where are you going?"

The man slewed round on his heels and began to make a queer cackling noise in his throat, suggestive of sour merriment.

"To which I'd answer, Who the devil may *ye* be, an' what is 't to ye where I'm wending? Ye've a lass's voice, an' a snod sort of a figure, what I can see on 't—but it beäts me to know what ye're after, scampering across th' moor at this time of a wild neet."

"I want to get to Wynyates, and you are going to show me the way."

Janet, fearless now, had come close up to her companion, and rested a hand on his sleeve.

"Begow, tha'rt a cool un!" he muttered, half admiringly. "But I can't do 't; there's a wife an' three waiting at home, an' I mun put th' best foot forrard to reach 'em come ten o'clock."

"I *must* cross to Wynyates, I tell you, and I'm afraid of losing my way if I go alone. Can you find it with snow on the ground?"

"Well, I reckon I can. I've known it, man an' boy, these forty year."

"If money will persuade you, you can take my purse and welcome. I don't know how much there is in it, but if it isn't enough——"

"I don't want your money," growled the man. "I niver said a word to leäd ye to think I wanted that."

"Then you won't come?" she said impatiently.

He shuffled from one foot to another, continued his growls in an undertone, and finally started off in the direction of Wynyates.

"Ay, I'll come. Ye may be up to no godliness, but ye've got some sperrit in ye—an' that's saying a deal for a woman. Come on."

As Captain Laverack was playing whist in the drawing-room, and inwardly reviling his partner's experimental style of play, the butler came behind his chair and asked for a word with him.

"All right, Denman; it will wait till we've finished our rubber, I suppose?"

"It *will* wait, sir, but——"

Laverack saw from the man's air that the matter was a grave one, and rose from the table as soon as the hand was played, leaving his place to a youngster who had been much more pleasantly employed at the piano.

"Well?" he demanded, standing just outside the door, which he had closed behind him.

"It's about Miss Laverack, sir. She is not in her room, nor anywhere else in the house, that we can find. Mrs. Rigby, sir, was looking out of doors an hour or so ago, and she saw a figure in a cloak go past Sultan's kennel."

Laverack wiped his forehead.

"Yes, yes; go on," he said irritably. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I've only just heard it, sir; and Mrs. Rigby didn't like to come and tell you, seeing that the figure was come and gone

so quick that she had scarcely time to make sure of it. It was snowing, too, at the time."

"Did she recognize Miss Laverack?"

"It was about her height and figure. Besides, she stopped and patted Sultan, and he left off growling at once. It must have been Miss Laverack, sir."

Laverack began to pace up and down the long corridor, talking to himself in his quick, nervous way. "I can't raise the alarm, because that would give the confounded girl away to every guest in the house. Oh, damn it, why didn't I do as I intended to do at first, and leave here a week ago? It would have meant putting off the house-party, but anything would have been better. Where does this fellow Roddick live? Wynyates, isn't it? Five miles away, they tell me. She is sure to have gone there. Well, I must get on to a horse, I suppose, and follow as fast as I can: it will be all up with Janet if I don't bring her back to-night."

He came opposite Denman again, and the butler coughed apologetically—

"Have you any orders for me, sir?"

"Orders? Yes; have the bay saddled, and waiting at the end of the drive in ten minutes. Not a word of this, Denman, to any one."

It was not very long since Rigby, whose fears on the point may be remembered, had been constrained to tell his wife of the disinterested part he was playing as messenger between Miss Laverack and Mr. Roddick of Wynyates. And Mrs. Rigby, though pledged to absolute secrecy by all she held sacred in the world, had nevertheless been unable to refrain from repeating the story, in confidence, to her friend the cook. From the cook it had travelled round, still strictly in confidence, to the ears of Denman, the butler; and Denman, having lately endangered his comfortable post here by a rather glaring misdemeanour, promptly repeated what he had heard to his master, hoping by this means to re-establish his shaken credit. Laverack, being a man who was not over-nice in his own methods, credited his keeper with like principles; and his

certainty that Rigby would spread the tale far and near, if dismissed, was his sole reason for keeping man and wife in his employ. Poor Rigby, whose only faults were an inordinate love of mystery and a tendency to give others the benefit of his experiences, had been almost heart-broken when he learned that it was all over with the meetings between Roddick and Janet. Laverack had stormed and raved, and had with difficulty been persuaded to stay at the Folly till the invited guests should have come and gone. Even as it was, Janet was never sure from day to day that he would not get rid of everyone on some excuse of sickness or bereavement; and she resolved to bring matters to a crisis before she was again dragged away from Roddick.

"By Gad, what a night!" muttered Laverack, as he went quietly out of the house and crossed to the bend of the drive where his horse was waiting for him. "Why Heaven gives a man daughters, Heaven only knows. I shall be wet to the skin before I get back. Cranshaw first, if that knave Rigby told me right, and after that I must ask the way."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT THE SNOWFLAKES FELL UPON.

At four of the same afternoon, while the sun was setting redly into the snow-banks, Griff Lomax sat in the parlour of Gorsthwaite, with his child's dead body on his knees. The grate was fireless, and the failing twilight left all but the table and a chair near the window in darkness. The two maid-servants, and Simeon, the farm-man, moved uneasily about the kitchen, and asked one another in muffled tones how it was likely to fare with the master. Early that morning the child had followed its mother, and Griff, alone here in the parlour, was dumbly kicking against the pricks. One after another, all that he had in the world had gone into that shadowy Beyond of which he had neither fear nor hope. On his knees lay the refutation of all the dreams he had cherished, the plans he had framed, for the future of another Lomax who should carry down the name, who should add one more to the list of moor-men that had thriven under the old Manor roof. From time to time he stroked the little cold body with his own cold hands, and laughed softly to himself: it seemed a hideous jest that this scrap of tissue, which would soon be worse than the earth that covered it, should have caused such fantasies. It was to have grown to a lusty manhood, and fought and loved and hated—and now—and now—

Such utter vacuum, of mind and purpose, could not go on. No man, with strength at his command, can see life for long as an empty mirror of his own emptiness. Something must be done, was the thought that flashed into Griff's mind. He got up from his chair and laid the body on it; then walked slowly

up and down the darkened room, striking against the furniture, and feeling vaguely glad of the smarts.

A cry broke from him. Round and round his brain, in a dizzy, never-ending circle, ran those words of the doctor's—

It is all owing to that brute Strangeways; he led her a dog's life for years.

The frightened servants, listening by the kitchen fire, heard the door of the parlour open with a clash. The master went heavily down the passage and out at the front door. There was work for him yet in the world.

"Poor lad!" murmured the cook, who was older than her master, and eager to mother him with her phrases. "Poor lad, it fair goes to a body's heart to see th' way he's taking on."

"He war bad enow when th' missus died; but it's nowt to what's ta'en him since," said the housemaid, with a tug at her apron-corner.

"We've getten to dee, all on us. He mun grin an' bear it, same as other fowk do." But there was a huskiness in Simeon's voice that belied his avowed philosophical outlook on the tragedy.

One thought only held Griff—that he must find his enemy and exact an eye for an eye, a death for a death. Not a hint of carrying out a moral law, of ensuring justice where the law was powerless to demand it, lay at the bottom of his mind. Such weak shifts for the excusing of his deed were foreign to all Griff's ways: the splendid vengefulness of the savage was on him now, unspotted by weakness or self-questioning.

Instinct drove him back to the stables after he had traversed half a mile of the moor: he might have far to go in search of his quarry, and a horse would serve him better. The roads were bad enough for riding, but Lassie was well-sharpened against the frost, and she was sure-footed. At any rate, his neck mattered little, so long as he could reach Joe Strangeways before it was broken.

Off they went, he and Lassie, through the thickening snow to Sorrowstones Spring, where Strangeways had come to live since the old witch's death. Griff leaped from the mare's back

and ran to the door. It was locked, and no trace of light showed through the unshuttered window on the left. He kicked at the door till the bottom panels gave way; then crept through the opening. But the cottage was empty.

"Where shall we go next, old girl?" he cried, with a hoarse laugh, as Lassie turned her head at his approach.

But Lassie had no counsel to give, and his eyes went up to the line of sentinel stoups: the white under-part could not be seen, and each blackened tip seemed to hang, self-supported, in mid air. Vague echoes of a sorrow spent long ago came to Griff: the stoups seemed to speak to him in some sad, far-off way. Perhaps they pointed the road he should go—at least he might try a mile or two of it, and gallop an inspiration into his musty brain. A Marshcotes man, trudging lumpily down the hill, stopped in amazement as horse and rider clattered past him.

"Griff Lummax, I'll warrant, though it's ower dark to be sartin sure. What's agate wi' th' lad, ony way?" he muttered.

Griff turned as soon as he gained the top of the hill. What fool's errand was this—riding straight to Ludworth, when the man he sought was to be found either in Cranshaw or Marshcotes? He must go first to Cranshaw, straight down the highroad, and search the inns there; then to Marshcotes; and, if that failed, he would look in at Jack o' Ling Crag's hostelry.

Joe Strangeways, meanwhile, was drinking in the bar of the Bull at Marshcotes. He had failed in his quarry-business since his wife left him, and he laid the blame of this on Griff. If, he reasoned, he had not been robbed of his one inducement to keep sober, he would have gone less on the drink; and if he had gone less on the drink, then he would have kept his quarries. He forgot how little influence of any kind Kate had had over him; he grew to believe that she had been the pole-star of his life, and he thought with lachrymose tenderness of the cosy hearth that had once tempted him away from the Bull. And now here he was, spending his last half-crown in the beer that had leagued with Griff Lomax to ruin him.

"Has tha heärd o' young Lummax's trouble?" some one dropped to his neighbour.

"Ay; an' they say th' bairn is nobbut weakly like, an' noan like to live. It's been a sorry winter for young Lummax, that it hes."

"A sorry winter?" flashed Joe from his corner. "It'll be a sorrier afore I've done wi' him."

"We've heärd a like tale afore now, Joe. Happen tha's getten to think there's summat in it, same as a cock makes fine sense out on his crowing when he's been at it a bit."

"Thee bide, lad, thee nobbut bide."

"We *hev* bided—a seet o' months; an' nowt has come on 't yet, as I can see on."

"Tha's getten thy chance, if tha wants it," chimed in another. "I war coming ower th' Ludworth road a while back, an' just by Sorrowstones Spring a horse comes racketting by me. It war main dark, save for a kind o' glint on th' snaw, but I knew who th' rider war: he war tearing along fair as if owd Nick hed hold on his coat-tails, an' there's none hereabouts, saving Griff Lummax, what flies about at that fooil's pace. He war off to Ludworth, likely, an' tha'll be i' nice time to meet him as he comes back."

Joe looked savagely from one to another.

"Ye think yourselns a fearful clever lot, doan't ye? I'll show ye—ay, th' whole damned lot on ye—whether I'm talking straight or no. Gie us a crowbar, i'stead o' sitting there like grinning gawks, an' let me be off about my business."

A shout of laughter went up as one of the company dived into his tool-bag, and, fetching out a neat little two-foot crowbar, handed the weapon to Joe with a face of great solemnity. Joe seized it and lurched out into the passage, muttering as he went.

"He'll be back afore long. A rare old wind-bag is Joe," laughed the owner of the crowbar.

And they all fell to at their mugs again, waiting for the fun that was in store, when Joe should return, shambling and shamefaced, for another pint of beer.

But Joe, in his own way, was as desperate as Griff. He was a beggar, and likely to remain so; his body was a worn-out machine, and work of any kind seemed little short of torture. And then he had nursed that feud of his till it had grown into a mania. The fight on the moor came to him to-night—the fight in which he had had his knife close at Griff's throat. There should be no mistake this time.

And so, while the snow fell ever thicker, these two, Lomax and Strangeways, went hither and thither across the moor, one in search of the other. Only the tallest heather-plants kept their heads above ground, and even they were bound to go under soon. Nothing stirred but the flakes, and these had a ghastly dumbness.

Joe came to Sorrowstones Spring at last, and cowered under the highroad wall, a field's-length off from his cottage.

"Hell alive, it's fit to rot a man's heart in his body, is wark on a neet like this!" he muttered. "If he'd nobbut come afore my fingers are stark an' stiff!"

He handled the crowbar lovingly, and began to talk to it. First he confided to it what he was set on doing, and then, as the waiting grew more tedious, he told it all that had gone before—dilating on Kate's beauty, their happiness before Griff came to spoil it, his lonely after-life, with only drink to sweeten it.

And to all this the slim, two-foot crowbar listened patiently; but it was cold in his grasp when he began, and cold when his story was done. It seemed callous to all claims of sympathy.

The cold and the beer between them sent Joe off into a fit of dizziness. He leaned hard against the wall to recover himself, and laughed thickly to the little iron bar.

"It's gooid hot blood we want, my beauty, thee an' me—thee to warm thy heart, an' me to warm my belly. Well, lass, we'll bide a bit longer; he can't be such a fearful while i' coming now.—What's that?"

Away up the road, far beyond the last of the stoups that could be seen from Sorrowstones, there sounded a faint *pit-pat.*

On it came—*pit-pat, pit-pat*—the muffled beat of hoofs, striking through the snow to the frozen underground.

Joe moved from his sheltering wall. His sickness was forgotten, his crowbar passively awaited commands. Out of the whirling whiteness came a man and a horse, creeping warily down the steepest bit of the hill. The road ran between high banks of ling and bents, and on the right bank the quarry-master waited. Nearer and nearer came the two figures; they moved from side to side of the road, to lessen the steepness of the descent, until at last they passed close to where Strangeways was cowering in the snow. Like a flash Joe sprang at his victim, and brought the crowbar down on his skull.

The rider's shoulders dropped forward, his head lying heavy between them. The horse, not counting on this sudden slackening of the reins, lost his footing, and came heavily to ground, his fore-feet doubled under him. His master flew out of the saddle, and lay, a shapeless heap, in the middle of the road.

The horse had broken both knees, and was crying piteously; but Strangeways never so much as heard it. He went to the dead man's body, and sat on his upturned breast. Into his brain stole the words of a grim jest that a comrade had passed with him not many days before.

"Thy next suit will be thy coffin; thy next suit will be thy coffin, Griff! Griff, lad, I've getten thee at last; bide still an' wait for thy shroud." He paused to chuckle at the flavour of his little phrase, then repeated it again and again. "Thy next suit will be thy coffin."

After a while he found his seat a hard one, and knelt in the snow to see what it was that inconvenienced him. He felt in the man's breast-pocket, and brought out a large brandy-flask, three-parts full.

"Strong, by God! It'll be a merry neet an' a warm now," he laughed, as he reseated himself on the corpse, after an experimental pull at the flask. "Shut thy din, wilt 'a!" he cried to the horse, a moment later, as the poor brute shrieked in agony.

Then he turned to the brandy again, and drank it slowly,

rocking himself to and fro on the body and setting to a kind of guttural chant his two-line hymn—"Thy next suit—next suit—next suit—thy next suit will surely be thy coffin and a shroud—coffin and—coffin and—coffin and a shroud."

Gradually his eyelids fell upon his cheeks, tried to lift themselves, and failed. He rolled off into the snow, and clasped his victim tight in his arms, snoring with drunken noisiness. But the horse cried and whimpered, whimpered and cried, till the hurrying snowflakes seemed to be running this way and that in search of aid.

Up the highroad from Cranshaw, Griff and Lassie were toiling heavily. They had had a hard cross-country night of it, and both were fagged out.

"All right, Lassie, all right, girl; just to Sorrowstones Spring, to see if he's back yet, and then home," murmured Griff.

He had stopped at every inn in Marshcotes and Cranshaw and Ling Crag, and only at the Bull had he found news of Strangeways. Surely he must be home by this time.

But Lassie had her head low down and her ears set back; she was shivering from head to foot, for that cry of one of her own race had reached her long before Griff was aware of it. Every forward step made her more restive, till at last they reached the two black splashes on the snow. Griff slid from the saddle, and stooped to examine the first splash. He found his father's foe, Laverack, locked tight in the arms of the enemy he sought. Into the gloom ahead, between the sentinel stoups, pointed a little, deep ravine, where the blood had melted the snow.

He stood up and cursed the Providence that had robbed him of his right of action. He turned Joe's body over with his foot. The snoring, that had grown fainter and fainter, ceased altogether; a dull kind of grunt was Joe's only acknowledgment of the attention.

"You hog! Why aren't you fit to stand on your legs and fight me?" cried Griff.

He halted awhile, his hands going nervously to and fro above the body.

"No, I can't do it," he muttered dully, and went to that other patch of black.

In a trice his sympathies were awake, though they had seemed stone dead a moment ago. He knelt beside the quivering beast, and his tears dropped hot on the sweating coat.

"They needn't have mixed *you* up with our quarrels," he said softly.

He felt the broken limbs, and saw that there was only one thing to be done.

But how to do it? He looked at the crowbar lying in the snow at his feet; that was useless. Then he bethought him of the cottage, and ran hot-foot to see if Strangeways had left a gun about. He crept through the broken panels again, felt round the room till his hands fell on a tinder-box, and lit a rushlight that stood on the chimney-piece. A cumbersome muzzle-loader lay in one corner—the same corner in which Mother Strangeways' bed had stood that night when she called him in out of the storm. He took up the gun, found it loaded and primed, and went back to the highroad.

"There will be a row soon, old lady. I'd better fasten you up," he said quietly, as he hitched Lassie's reins to the gate-post.

He put the gun-muzzle close to the ear of the horse lying on the ground, and pulled the trigger.

"God forgive me!" he muttered. "I had it in mind to kill a man just now—but a horse——"

He went to the two men lying a little further down the hill. Laverack's heart made no response to the hand that was laid on it, and the snow lay unmelted on Joe's set lips.

"Come, Lassie; it's home now," said Griff, as he untethered the mare.

CHAPTER XXX.

BY WAY OF WYNYATES.

By the time that Lassie had been put up in the stable, groomed, and fed, the snow had ceased, though the frost bit harder than ever. Griff fastened the stable-door, and moved irresolutely towards the house. Then he remembered what was inside, on the seat in the parlour where he had laid it. The bairn, indeed, was lying on a bed upstairs, washed and laid out by the women-folk; but to Griff's fancy it was still in the chair, and he shrank from the thought of entering.

Out there in the cold he stood and tried to feel, and wondered at the hideous blank that stretched on, on before him, characterless as the even plain of snow to north and south and east and west of this mid-moor house. He cried aloud in his desolation, and hard on the heels of the need to voice his trouble came the need for fellowship. He must have touch of human sympathy; that was the one thing needful, the one thing vital. Then, slowly, he began to think of the preacher, of Greta, of Leo Roddick. And Roddick seemed the strongest of them all, the fittest to give him help.

Yes; he would hurry across to Wynyates. Old Roddick was never the man to mind being knocked up in the middle of the night, if there were need for it. And God knew there *was* need for it now; he must save his reason, since all else had gone by the board.

The snow was crisping under the frost fingers, and the stars shone clear. He tried not to let the quick motion, the keen air, bring back his scattered impressions of all that had happened during the past few days. When a memory cut at

his heart, he walked faster, thinking to drive it out; when the memory returned, he quickened to a run, as if to dodge it by flight. He reached Wynyates at last, and pounded at the door with his fists. From within sounded a low cry, in a woman's voice, and the patter of feet across the hall.

"Is that you, Leo?" said the voice. "Dear, I have waited so long for you."

The door was opened, and on the threshold stood Janet Laverack, never doubting but that it was Roddick who waited on the other side. She was dressed as she had been for dinner that night at the Folly; but she had taken off her sodden shoes and stockings, and her little white feet peeped out from a pair of Roddick's old slippers, absurdly too large for her. The bottom of her skirt, too, was grievously bedrabbled.

Griff stepped into the light.

"I am Roddick's friend," he said vaguely.

The girl looked and looked at him. He would have been an alarming object enough in broad daylight, and with help to be had for the asking; but to-night he showed ghastly, dishevelled as he was, his clothes steaming like a moor fog now that he had come into the warmth. Janet, however, knowing that she must face the danger by aid of her wits alone, neither screamed nor gave way.

"Who are you?" she asked in a low voice.

"Griff Lomax. I—I came to ask Roddick's help. Isn't he at home?"

A curious half-smile played about the girl's lips.

"*I* came to ask his help, too; so we are friends so far. I know you well by name. You have had trouble lately?"

Griff went light-headed for a moment. The oak panelling of the hall circled round him; he lifted his eyes to the girl's to steady himself.

"Trouble?" he repeated, with an empty laugh. "Oh, nothing to speak of—wife and child left me for good, that is all—died, you know——"

"Come and sit down here; you are not yourself," said the girl, peremptorily.

The last of her fear had vanished at sight of his helplessness, and she was feeling that same need for action which had weighed so heavily on Griff a while ago.

He dropped obediently into the armchair.

"When did you last have food?" went on Janet.

"I—I forget. Some time this morning, I believe—just before the child died."

She went off to the pantry without another word, and brought out cold beef and bread. A bottle of whisky was standing on the sideboard, and she poured him out a liberal allowance.

"Now, eat and drink. It was high time you sought some one who could look after you."

Griff shook his head.

"I can't," he muttered obstinately.

"You shall," she answered quietly, putting a plate on his knee, and the tumbler on the hob beside him.

Again he succumbed to the stronger will, and did as he was bid. His appetite grew with each mouthful, and he passed his plate for more when he had finished. And after that he mechanically pulled out his pipe, filled and lit it.

"There!" said Janet, approvingly. "Smoke away, and tell me all about it."

Griff almost smiled at her quaint, elderly air. It seemed very much like a dream, all this; and easily as in a dream he found himself telling Janet all that had happened. She was quiet for a little after he had finished; then—

"We were talking about you, Leo and I, not long ago. He told me of your wife's death, and I was, oh, so sorry for you, though I had never even seen you. Only, I can guess what the feeling must be. If Leo were to die, I think I should just stop living and have done with it." She was craftily drawing him away from his own trouble, and into hers. "You won't think it odd of me to be talking to you like this? Because, you see, Leo tells me you know all our story."

"How do you come to be here?" said Griff, abruptly.

"I couldn't bear it any longer, so I came; that's why. And

Leo was—was *a brute* to me. That is why I hadn't the heart to be afraid of you when you came."

"A brute? How do you mean?"

"He talked of my sacrificing myself, and he lectured me, just as if I had been a silly school-girl, following the first romantic notion she had got into her head. If Leo *could* have killed my love, he would have done it long ago: he shocks and hurts me when he is angry. Poor old boy!" she broke off suddenly. "He is doing more for that—that woman, than I would ever do. And here am I blaming him for being a brute."

"Which woman?" asked Griff, who was still struggling with his faculties.

"The woman who calls herself his wife. The nurse sent across, soon after I came, to say that she was unmanageable, and Leo went with her. I expect him home every minute. I want him back, too, though I know he will be angrier than ever with me; he always is after these struggles. It costs him so much not to let her die at these times."

"Did Roddick allow you to stay here?"

This was another of Griff's childishly direct questions. He had got a little away from his own worries, and was growing responsive to the interest in his friend's situation. Somewhere, too deep down to be brought to the surface as yet, was a feeling that a certain plan, if he could once hit on it, would give all three of them relief.

"He had to. There could be no question of my returning across the moors, so he was going to sit up here all night, leaving his room to me. He had packed me off to bed a moment before the nurse came, but I listened at the head of the stairs and slipped down when he had gone, to see that everything was nice and warm for him on his return."

"Just as Kate used to do, just as Kate used to do for me," muttered Griff.

"But it will all have to be fought out again to-morrow," the girl went on. "And father will guess where I am and fetch me, when they find out in the morning that I have run away;

and that will be the end of it, if Leo won't let me be strong, instead of just good in a worldly way."

She felt, somehow, that this shaggy, unkempt man was rather on the plane of the animals, to whom we talk freely of the things that lie nearest our hearts. She was already losing sight of the bitter personal grief that had brought him here.

Griff remembered that her father could never in this world come to fetch her; but that seemed a matter of lighter moment, and he waited to hear more from her. That fugitive idea was taking more definite shape in his brain.

"Do you think we ought to wait, year after year, till my hair is grey, and my face wrinkled, and I'm too unspeakably hideous to give him a moment's pleasure?" demanded the girl, after a reflective pause. She leaned forward eagerly for his answer.

"No, I don't," said Griff, with sudden energy. "Take your chance while you have it, and thank the Lord for every scrap of happiness you snatch out of the fire."

"Ah, I thought you would be on my side. Will you tell Leo that? Will you help me to show him that waiting is the only real sacrifice? It is only me he thinks of, you know, all through, and that makes it all the harder to bear when I know how blind he is to my needs."

That nascent idea leaped in Griff's brain.

"I can help you to more than that, if once I see my way clear," he said.

She looked doubtfully at him, fearing a return of his first distraught condition. But his mouth was firm, his eyes bright.

"I don't understand you," she murmured.

"I don't understand myself yet. Give me time.—There's Roddick. Shall I let him in?" he broke off, as a strong hand was laid on the outer door.

She flushed a little.

"No, I can't let you do that. It is my privilege."

Griff, sitting quietly by the fire, knew that she was lying in Roddick's arms out there, and for a moment he grudged them their partial happiness. Then he smiled gravely, and tried to

understand how he might help these two. If only he could find a deed of real charity to do, he might yet win peace for himself.

In the midst of his pondering, Roddick stamped across the hall and into the parlour.

"So you're here," he began, with more than his usual gruffness. But he stopped at sight of his friend's face. "Old man, what has happened to you? You look like a corpse, and your clothes are dripping wet!"

"I came to talk things over with you, and found Miss Laverack here instead. She has done me a world of good," said Griff, simply.

"She ought never to have been out of bed at this time. Janet, off you go. Lomax and I will make an all-night sitting of it, and thrash our troubles out together."

She came and gave Griff her hand, smiling at him with royal friendliness.

"Good night," she whispered. "Try to make the best of it." Then, turning before she had got half across the room, "Leo, can't you give your friend a change? I ought to have thought of it sooner. He will catch his death of cold."

"I won't bother. I'm used to getting wet through."

"Yes, you will bother," put in Roddick. "Upstairs you come, and put dry things on at once. Janet, can you wait down here a little? We shan't be long."

When at last they were alone together, Roddick drew Griff on to talk of his troubles, and afterwards—just as Janet had done, but with less of self in his motive—he tried to beguile him with details of his own sufferings.

"This place goes by the name of Wynyates—'Gates of the Wind,' it means, they tell me; and, God, I can well believe it! They couldn't have hit on a better name. Half a mile north lives a woman I go out of my way to take care of, lest she should give me my liberty; five miles to the other side Janet lives. A cold blast and a warm wind screech and whimper, day and night, round Wynyates. They seem to blow

clean through me, Lomax; but I daren't evade them. It gets on the nerves in time," he finished, tranquilly.

Griff sat up in his chair and glared across the hearth. "You're an immaculate fool, Roddick. Every time you save your wife, conscience or no conscience, you stab the woman you are in love with.—Was she bad to-night?"

"Worse than I've seen her yet. The poor devil of a nurse is half-killed with the work. She said I could leave her for the rest of the night; but I shouldn't have done if Janet had not been here. I expect to have the nurse on my hands next. Then there's Janet; how am I going to steer her through the pretty mess she has got herself into?"

Griff had got hold of the right end of his idea now. "Tell me more about your wife," he said eagerly. "Where does she live?"

"At a cottage called Bents Foot, half a mile further up the hill. You seem interested in the woman; are you thinking of dropping a piece of paste-board on her?" snapped Roddick, with bitter levity.

"You're sure you can't get a divorce?" went on Griff, with the same eager persistence.

"No, I tell you!"

The other gave vent to a sigh that was oddly suggestive of relief. "She can live any length of time, can't she?"

"Heaven only knows. Years ago she ought to have died; years ahead she may be living. And meanwhile my little darling is killing herself by inches."

Again that quick, sharp sigh from Griff.

"Killing herself by inches?" he repeated.

"Yes, damn you! why play the parrot to a beggarly statement of fact?"

Griff threw a couple of peats on a fire that needed no replenishing.

"Well," he said, settling back into his seat, "let us put away our worries, old man; we're getting morbid. Perhaps a talk about old times will do us good."

Roddick failed to notice a something that lay very near to

the surface of the other's apparent carelessness; after chatting of this and that, he began to nod, then to doze; until finally he was sleeping as soundly as if there were no perplexities to be faced on the morrow.

But Griff had no inclination to sleep. He sat there, watching now the live peats, now his friend's face. As the dawn crept white over the white snow, he went quickly from the house towards a cottage called Bents Foot.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MOOR MAN GOES OUT TO HIS OWN.

At the top of the rise that overlooked Wynyates, the chimney-stack of Bents Foot stood out, black and rigid as a funeral mute, against the grey-white of the sky. Griff plodded his way through the snow, till he stood at the cottage window. A figure was standing inside, its queer, distorted face pressed close against the glass. He motioned towards the door, and the figure fell back a little, so that he could no longer see anything more than a faint shadow moving up and down in the twilight of the room. He tried the door, and found it locked, as he had expected. But he felt no impatience; he only stood and looked out over the snow-sea, wondering at his calm and thinking it sanity.

After awhile he heard the sound of a key turning in the lock. Roddick's wife crept out, and came and peered into his face.

"What do you want? Have you come to take me to Leo?" she mumbled.

"No."

"Then you can go away. I must find him myself." She, too, looked across the waste of snow, and shivered. "It's only a little way off, but the road is hid. I might fall in the snow and die; and Leo, for all his rough ways, would break his heart if he lost me." She was in one of her cringeing moods; her words came ramblingly, and dropped with the helpless fall of a withered leaf. "He'd break his heart if he lost me," she wailed.

"So he would," said Griff, with equal gravity. "Wait till

he comes for you. I'll stay with you, if you'll give me something to drink."

Her eyes brightened as she clutched at his arm.

"Drink? How can I give you drink, when he—he, and she, the woman in there—lock it all up out of reach?"

"We can soon alter that. What's the nurse doing?"

She rubbed her hands together and chuckled softly.

"Fast asleep. After Leo went, her eyes were too tired to keep open. It isn't often *she* goes to sleep."

Griff followed her into the room, through the window of which he had first seen her. The nurse was half-sitting, half-lying in a long cane-chair near the fireplace. The peats were smouldering dully in the grate. Roddick's wife pointed across at her, but would not go near; when her quieter fits were on, she dreaded the great, raw-boned woman in the chair, who helped Leo to keep the drink from her.

"It's all in here," she whispered, scratching at the door of a cupboard just above her head. "The key is in her pocket."

With the deftness of a pickpocket Griff felt for the key and took it out. He unlocked the cupboard, and crossed over to the window.

"Take what you want," he said.

The mad woman peered into the cupboard, uttering little screams of delight. She ran her hand caressingly along the bottles. The nurse moved in her sleep, then opened her eyes.

"It's all right," murmured Griff; "I am looking after her."

"Mind you do. It's death if she touches a drop to-day," said the nurse, drowsily, and closed her eyes again.

When Griff came out into the road again, the sun was sparkling on the frozen snow. The strain of his great endeavour was not past yet; his face showed strong, his mind was clear. He was thinking—not of what he had done, but of the happiness he had secured for two of his friends. It seemed almost better than if he had won happiness for himself. The glow of a fine altruism lit up his eyes.

He walked quickly down till he came opposite Wynyates

Hall, and turned as if to go through the garden gate. But he thought better of it.

"Good news is better for the keeping; I will wait a while," he said to himself softly.

Then he fell to wondering what the old home looked like, and a yearning to see it again took hold of him. He went down the hill, and up the other side, and on until he gained Ling Crag. As he passed Gabriel Hirst's house, the preacher was standing in the doorway, kissing Greta good-bye before he went out. Griff smiled in a fatherly way, and called to Gabriel by name.

"What, you?" cried the preacher, hastening across the newly-swept flagstones to the gate.

Greta followed him, and they stood there, staring at Griff's dishevelled hair and happy face.

"You mean to make a honeymoon of your whole lives, you two?" said Griff.

The preacher's hand went out to him.

"I've lived a life of fear, Griff—constant fear. And now I'm free at last; free to look the sun in the face, and hob-nob with the wind, and feel that God's strength is His mercy, too. There is none like Greta."

"Except Gabriel," whispered the lass. But the laugh died on her lips, for she remembered the man's troubles. "What can any one say to help you?" she asked simply.

"Help? I don't need help. All's for the best in the long run. God bless you both! Good-bye."

"But, man——" began Gabriel.

His friend did not hear—or, hearing, disregarded it. He swung out along the road to Marshcotes.

Greta looked after him, and shook her head.

"He is not in his senses, Gabriel."

"Likely not, poor chap. He's had enough to turn any man's head. But I never dreamed it would take him like this—he might be off to his wedding. Greta, lass, you must never leave me as Griff's wife left him."

Instinctively his arms went round her—to protect her even

against God; and old Jose Binns, coming round at that moment from the lathe, set his mouth to a cynical shape.

"Kissing an' cuddling," muttered Joe. "Nay, there's no mak o' gooid can come o' yon."

The hard weather had driven grouse and plover alike to tameness. They walked up and down the streets of Marshcotes, and perched on the window-sills in search of crumbs, and looked at passers-by in the light of old foes turned allies. A mirthless old cock grouse, and a drabbled hen, sat on the Manor wall as Griff came up, and made their plaints to him; but the cock-bird's call had none of that noisy self-assurance about it which had startled Griff many a time in the darkness of the moors. The same tenderness that had prompted his pity for Laverack's horse bade him go to the baker's at the corner and buy a quartern loaf. He took the bread with him into the Manor garden and crumbled it on the doorstep. It was an act his father would have applauded, he thought.

He stood for awhile, looking at the grey old walls with eyes that saw only the past. But the sharp stab of the present took him unawares, and blinded his eyes with tears. He turned, knowing himself for evermore an outcast.

The reaction came on apace, as he crossed the churchyard and struck into the moor. He had an old man's look, an old man's droop of the shoulders. He began to mutter as he walked, in a disjointed, senile way. The clear conception of duty, the needlessness of self-excuse, were fast disappearing; he had to explain to himself *why* his course had been the right one.

"No one can say I have wasted my life now. But for me, she might have lived for years; and Roddick and the girl would have grown old in misery. So easy, too: it wasn't as if I killed her; she did it herself. Strange—to watch her drink and drink—her head falling lower—how could any sane man have stopped her? Just a bit of filthy clay she was, standing between Roddick and his heart's desire. Roddick, old man, you are free of your love at last; may she stick to your side longer than—— God, how still the moor is! Why doesn't it blow and rain and hail, in the good moor way? Nothing but

snow, and snow on the top of that, with mile on mile of that devilish, everlasting sun-shimmer."

He stopped and gazed fearfully across the waste. It seemed that even the moor-face, his friend, had hid itself in anger at his deed. He was homeless altogether. His hands clawed fitfully through the air.

"What's that whisper going abroad? *Murder*. No, no; merely a drinking bout, and a good riddance. I must be the first to tell Roddick. It seems further to Wynyates than it used to do."

He crossed at the head of Hazel Dene, and the drone of the mill-wheel sounded below him.

"They are grinding corn for bread down there," he said; then laughed at some odd side-shaft of incongruity that the thought suggested.

He hurried on till he gained Wynyates. One window of the parlour was open to the dry, sharp air, and he heard voices within. Cautiously he crept under the window and raised his head a few inches above the sill.

Roddick was standing with his back to the window. Facing him was Janet, her eyes red with weeping, her whole body shaken with sobs.

"Listen, child," Roddick was saying; "you must go back at once. I will walk home with you across the moor. Come quickly, for God's sake! I am arguing against myself all the while, and I cannot hold out much longer. Come!"

He dropped her hands, and turned to the chair over which her cloak was hanging. He took the cloak and tried to place it round her shoulders. She struggled, threw it aside, put both hands about his neck.

"Leo, Leo!" she sobbed; "I won't, I can't go back! I have eaten my heart out long enough. We have waited and waited, you and I, for that other woman to die, and we have done enough."

A feeble chuckle came from without, but they did not hear it.

"Wait a little longer, sweetheart," Roddick pleaded. His

voice was strained and husky. "It cannot be for long. Think of the future; suppose we went away together to-night, and she died to-morrow—should we ever forgive ourselves?"

"Yes, we should. It may be years yet—and meanwhile it is killing *us*. Soon we shall be too old, too grey, too riven by the strain of it all. Leo, darling, come away while we can!"

She kissed him, wildly, beseechingly. For a moment he trembled, fell weak, all but gave in. But he was made of stubborn stuff; love was to conquer desire, so long as he had a trace of will-power left to him.

The man outside, with his pale face peering above the window-ledge, forgot everything in the excitement of this terrible drama. Mile on mile of desolate moor, and in the middle of it two people, a man and a woman, taking opposite sides in a conflict of honour; the man pleading for what he knew to be the woman's gain, and she pleading for a change of misery. Not a hope of interruption; the battle to be fought out just by these two. The impartial moor was willing to show them a path of flight, if they needed it—or a way to honour, if so the issue ran. Not a sound stirred; the wind and Griff spoke not a word.

"Wait!" gasped Roddick.

"I have waited too long, too long," she wailed, with childish repetition. "Leo, do you care for me so much, after all? You cannot, or you would not be hard like this."

He made as if to kiss her, then drew back. He dared not risk it.

"Oh, hush, Janet! You know I care for you. If I cared less, should I hesitate like this? You don't understand what you are asking me to do—you see only the first few steps."

"No, I have set it all before me—all. I will risk it, Leo."

The man outside, seeing the girl's full beauty, the tearfulness of her entreaty, scrabbled with his finger-nails up and down the stone of the window-sill.

"Roddick, you fool," he gasped, "why don't you take love in your two hands while you have the chance! Life is so

damnably short—and liable to accident—yes, accidents—the girl mayn't live. Oh, you unutterable fool, why don't you take the bit between your teeth? Cut and run; you told me to do as much once."

But Roddick was answering Janet in the same tone of eager entreaty. And Griff, forgetting his own feelings again, lost himself in the progress of the drama.

"Such a life, Janet, would grind you into the dust. It is easy to say you will face it—now. But wherever we went, however we hid ourselves, some one would drive it home to us. They would shatter your peace of mind, Janet, and I should go mad for pity of what I had brought you to. Come, little girl," he finished, with quiet decision. "I know you will trust me to do what is best."

"Bravo, Roddick! A plucky fight you're making!" cried the man without, breathlessly. The intensity of his excitement hurt him. He wanted the scene to close now.

Roddick had taken the girl in his arms with his last words; he was whispering tender incoherencies to her, as one does to a frightened child. Then he wrapped her, unresisting this time, in her cloak. The tears had dried in long stains down her white face, and she was gazing at him apprehensively.

"Leo."

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"You are right, quite right, and I am wrong. It was wicked of me to come here and tempt you. Only, you don't know how hard the home life is. Others come and make love to me, Leo, and it seems such an insult—to both of us. Yet I can say nothing, do nothing. But I oughtn't to have tempted you. Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you? Come along, little woman, and we won't talk about forgiveness till we have struck home across the moor; and then——"

"And then, dear?" she asked wistfully. It seemed so cold, this homeward journey.

"Then *I* shall plead for *your* forgiveness. You must have thought me a brute, Janet."

The man outside the window breathed again. The play, to all intents and purposes, was finished. Roddick had won, and there was only that twitching of the mouth to show how much it had cost him.

Griff Lomax awoke to a sense of his own importance in the drama. He remembered that a certain disreputable waif-and-stray, with a shipwrecked heart and a partially deranged understanding, held the key of the situation. He went to the door, opened it without ceremony, and stepped into the room.

Roddick turned quickly on the intruder. Janet cowered back against the window.

"What do you want?" demanded Roddick. The room was low and gloomy, and he failed to recognize Griff at a first glance.

"Don't you know me? I'm Lomax," laughed the newcomer.

Roddick stood staring at him for awhile; then went up to him.

"God in Heaven, man! what have you been doing? Last night you looked wild enough in all conscience, but now——"

"Doing?" interrupted Griff. "Something you will approve of, you two. I've tramped across the moor—and a pretty cold moor it is, by the way—to tell you that your wife is dead."

They noticed nothing out of the way in his voice or manner of giving the information. The tidings were too great to allow room for any thought of the bearer's looks.

"Dead?" cried Roddick.

"Yes, dead. I saw her not long ago."

Roddick fell back against the mantelpiece. A giddiness came over him. He could move neither hand nor foot, he could not speak, though he realized vaguely that he ought to shake his friend by the hand and give him hearty thanks.

But Janet made ample atonement for his remissness. She fell at Griff's feet, and kissed his hands, and named him the dearest man in the world. She was beside herself with joy; she scarcely knew what she was doing.

Griff raised the girl and gravely put her away from him.

"I killed her," he said, quietly.

Roddick stared at him from his place against the mantelshelf. He had had a stiff fight with conscience not long ago, and the pace of these new developments was altogether too fast for him.

Janet shuddered, and put the width of the room between herself and the man whom she had lately named a saviour.

"You—killed—her?" she whispered.

"Yes. Don't look at me like that. It is a mere nothing." His manner was growing wild. He laughed causelessly at intervals, and seemed to think his story rather humorous than otherwise. "I came last night, you remember, to see if old Roddick here could help me. I was going mad for want of a purpose. I felt like a derelict ship that has been tossing about aimlessly, day after day, week after week. I was willing to give anything to the man who would fit me out with sails and a rudder. Well, I found you, instead of Roddick, and you stood me a true friend—told me there was a woman to be killed—fitted a purpose to my hand at once. God bless you both!"

He ceased. Down the side of Roddick's nose a ridiculous tear was creeping, but Griff smiled, with a sort of paternal tenderness, on the two people for whom he had lately performed a trifling service.

"Old man!" cried Roddick. His voice was a woman's, inaudible almost in its desperate pity.

"Don't trouble about that," put in the other briskly, as if in answer to unspoken words of gratitude. "The least said, the soonest mended. You want to thank me, I know, and talk nonsense generally. I won't have it. Why, man, it's the easiest thing I ever did in my life!" On the sudden his face fell. He gibbered dumbly, like some voiceless ghost. "The moor, the moor," he whispered at last. "How still and white it is. It's not the moor I have known—not the moor I have loved my life through—it seems to shudder."

Still Roddick watched him. He could not break through

the miserable, obstinate silence that hid his sympathy. Reason came back to Griff's face, and firmness to his voice.

"There are two pictures in my studio at Gorsthwaite. I seem to care so little for that sort of thing now, but I know they are good. Will you look after them, Roddick, old man? Send them out into the world; they are the best work I ever did—and Kate lives in one of them."

Janet had forgotten Griff while teaching herself to realize the glad news he had brought them. In the utter selfishness of her love, in the sudden lifting of a burden she had borne too long, she surrendered herself wholly to delight. Her joy grew intolerable; she had to cry aloud.

"Leo, Leo, you are mine, mine altogether!" she said, in a voice between laughter and tears.

But Roddick, thinking of his true friend in need, was silent. He turned his back on them, and leaned his forehead on the mantelshelf, and wondered what would be the end of it for Lomax.

And Griff, meanwhile, passed quietly out into the stillness of the moor.

THE END.

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